

GUINEA GOLD

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BY

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THE
GRIMSHAW
FAMILY

GUINEA GOLD

CHAPTER I

THREE men sat upon the coral shore of Samarai, and talked about a fourth.

Their six boots—four heavy and nailed, two light brown leather the worse for wear—projected over the glaring, flour-white sand, and tinkled among the broken branches and fans of coral and the derelict shells from the reef. Pink and pearl and cream, thick as carved white marble, and as thin as Eastern porcelain, were these shells: strangers admired them, and went a-hunting for them on steamer days. But, when they had their hands full, they generally threw the fruit of their toil back into the sea. The shells looked well, nevertheless, they were dead, and you could see it when you handled them. Dead shells are those that have had the life and value burned out of them by tropic suns on far-off savage shores. They are of no use to anyone; you can only leave them on the beach, to rot in the devouring sun, and end their lives where they were cast away. There are many kinds of dead shells to be found on the coral beaches, south of Cancer and north of Capricorn, and not all of them own the sea as their home.

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The man with the brown boots was not pleasant-looking: he had only one advantage, that of youth. He could not have been more than twenty-five years of age; perhaps he was less. His face was fat, flat, and full, with a disagreeably small mouth, and pale blue eyes, somewhat too large for a man. The two other men were browned and toughened with sun: his skin was as white as a toadstool's, and his hands were soft and dimpled. The man looked damp and soft altogether; one felt certain that he would squash as flat as a spider if you trod upon him.

The others were of a different stamp from him and from one another. The person with the long, narrow face, and yellow walrus-like moustache, is Rupert Dence: you will hear more of him by and by. He wears his clothes well, though they consist, to-day, of nothing but a woollen singlet, a battered drill coat, and a pair of khaki trousers. His walrus moustache, his manner of looking and speaking, and a certain suggestion of an invisible single eyeglass somewhere, conveyed one knows not exactly how, create a dim mirage of London in the nineties about his neighbourhood. One feels that his clock of life, like the too-familiar clock of the old street song, "stopped short, never to go again," in London, in eighteen-ninety something, for some reason that Rupert Dence might give you, if you asked for it—and might not. Again, if you asked him, he might tell you that his name is not Dence at all, but something of the picture-poster kind: the sort of name

commonly chosen by Violets and Maries of the Palace or the Gaiety, to look well upon the bills. But he would not go further, no matter how drunk he might be.

Joe Anderson (christened John, but, for obvious reasons, always known as Joe) has an odd resemblance to Rupert Dence. You could not possibly tell where the resemblance lies, for Anderson has not a point or a feature in common with the other, being huge, square, stiff, and strong, with a massive brown beard and a face that looks as if you could turn the edge of an axe on its surface. But the resemblance is there. More, you can tell by their very way of sitting and speaking that they like one another, and have something in common. You can also tell that the third man, Clay, is not one of them, and that they are not going to ask him to join them when they detach themselves from the cool shade of the casuarina tree under which they are sitting, and trickle away down the beach into the bar of Figg's Federal Hotel. But they are interested in what he is saying.

He had been talking with a certain slow volubility, for three or four minutes on end, when Dence broke in.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Clay, but I don't quite understand. What makes you think that he carries a paper actually under his clothes?"

"That's my affair," replied Clay, with a small giggle. "I don't think it either—I know it. And

if it hasn't something to do with the Kikiramu goldfield, I'll eat it."

The man Joe Anderson let himself slide down the warm sand until his head rested against the root of the casuarina tree. Then he put his hands under his neck and yawned deliberately.

"Cut it: you've been reading too many penny stories," he said. "This isn't a pirate's island in the Caribbean Sea, in the eighteenth century: it's Papua in the twentieth. Besides, what would a raw new chum know about the Kikiramu, anyhow?"

"I'm not telling you what he ought to know, I'm telling you what he does," persisted Clay. "Anderson, you might pay more attention. I'm putting you and Dence on to a good thing, and you'll scarcely listen."

"You must pardon us, Mr. Clay," put in Rupert Dence, with an accent on the Mr. that apparently passed unnoticed. "So far all we've heard is that a certain fellow called Scott, who got off the *Matunga* yesterday, carries a paper next his heart. No doubt that concerns Mr. Scott's best girl pretty nearly, but it hardly seems to 'hit us where we live.' If that's all——"

"It's not," interrupted Clay, who rarely let anyone finish a sentence. "This Scott was asking questions about the Kikiramu goldfield an hour or two after he arrived. And he said he would like to meet some of the miners. As to the paper, what I'm telling you is gospel truth. You may trust me to see

farther into a stone wall than most people. I think I may fairly claim for myself that I always was sharper than the next man. I believe I'm speaking the absolute truth when I tell you that this Scott has some special information about the Kikiramu, and I think it's up to you to help me to find out. I'm not a miner; you are. Where I fail you can come in. I always know my own limitations, I can assure you."

"Oh, blow your limitations!" interjected Anderson, getting up. "Dence, come on, and leave this lunatic to rave alone."

"Stop a bit," said Dence, fixing Clay with his invisible eyeglass, and caressing his long moustache, till he looked like an early Du Maurier caricature. "You didn't say how you saw this precious paper, or what makes you think it is anything about gold."

"Well," declared Clay with some bravado, "when they put you two in a room in a place like Figg's, and a fellow flings about in his sleep in the other bed, you can't help seeing the outline of a flat packet. And I came in—I can assure you it was accidental—this morning after I had had breakfast, and found Scott with a paper spread out on the dressing-table—a map, I'm willing to swear—I saw it over——"

"Shut up!" growled Dence. "That's the fellow, isn't it?"

A man was coming towards the three on the

beach. He had evidently been walking round the island. Samarai, the island town of New Guinea, is said by a good many far-travelled people to be the most beautiful place in the world. The stranger looked as if he thought so: he was tramping along the white coral path slowly, between the high hedges of carmine- and daffodil-leaved croton trees, staring with all his eyes. Celadon green was the shoal water of the strait in front; peacock-breast blue the wider stretch beyond. Islands like bouquets of palm set in holders of pearl sprang out of the glass-still water. A long way off, on the other side, dark mountains draped in forest rose straight from the sea, forbidding, secret, grim.

"That's . . . Papua," said the unromantic-looking Anderson, following the stranger's eyes. "Something beautiful—and something black behind it."

"Yes, certainly, that's Papua," agreed the Englishman, Dence. "Smiles at you like a cannibal queen in love with you, and then biffs you over the head with a tomahawk first chance she gets."

The steamer passenger, Scott, had strolled past by this time, still looking at the wonderful panorama of the straits. Clay, getting impatient, dug Anderson with one finger in the ribs.

"That's him," he said. "Well, are you going to help me to find out what good thing he's got hold of when you go up to the Kikiramu again, or are you not? I'm stuck in this beastly store of King's,

and can't afford to leave it, or I'd have kept it to myself. I always——"

"Damn you and your always," said Anderson, quite politely. "Dence, take me off for a walk round the island, before I forget my naturally refined manners, and chuck—that—into the sea."

"You haven't listened," expostulated Clay. "You won't——"

"We've listened enough to know that you were as near pick-pocketing as circumstances would let you. We don't want any more. You've got a rat, anyhow. A man can't bring a map of the country up but you think you've hit another Treasure Island. Go and put your head in a bag, and when you've got your head in, put yourself after it, get some good friend to tie up the mouth, and chuck yourself off the jetty when there's a big shark in the neighbourhood. You'd be doing the public a service."

The two walked away and left Clay on the shore regarding his shabby boots with a vicious eye. Australians wear better boots, class for class, than English, and this fragment of scum, skimmed from Sydney gutters, always felt the injustice of Nature with especial keenness when he looked at his poorly shod feet. They were narrow, arched feet that, like his small hands, spoke of submerged "family." New South Wales is full of such men: prodigal sons packed off so freely to the ends of the earth, in the last generation or two, left descendants, acknowl-

edged and unacknowledged, that scarce adorn the country of their birth.

In the meantime, George Scott, electrical engineer of Belfast, finished his walk round the island, quite unconscious of the "storm in a billy-can" that had arisen about his steps, and returned to his hotel, which, as Clay had explained, was Figg's.

There are four hotels in Samarai,—the Universal, Bunn's, the Old New Guinea, and Figg's Federal. The three first are not precisely replicas of the Cecil or the Langham, but Figg's is worse. It is, so the white men of Papua say, the worst hotel in the world. And they ought to know, because the inhabitants of Papua know more about odd corners of the earth than the people of any other tropical colony you could mention.

Figg and Mrs. Figg are obliging and kindly people, and they do their best to make their guests happy. The native boys are told to wash out the rooms every rainy season, and they do. If anyone objects to use the sheets that the last lodger had, he can generally get fresh ones. You are allowed to choose the company in your bedroom as far as is conveniently possible, and if your room-mates get intoxicated every night, and keep you awake, no one minds your camping, trunks and bed and all, on the verandah. It is related of Mrs. Figg that her desire to make the most of a rare real fowl caused her, once on a time, to salvage the creature's limbs from the plates whereon they had been stripped, and

serve them up again in a stew, and afterwards (via the plates again) in various soups, until certain boarders of the baser sort complained. But she undoubtedly meant well. And when the guests at her table complained that the Kiwai waiter was suffering from native skin disease unpleasant to the eye, Mrs. Figg at once gave orders that he was to remain henceforward entirely in the kitchen and help the cook. More, when a steamer passenger new to Samarai objected to the serving of jams undecanted from the tin, did not Mrs. Figg denude her own dressing-table of every pomade pot and hairpin case it contained, and adorn the board with these valuable personal possessions? That some of the customers took exception to the appearance of hairpins, buttons, and stray teeth of combs, in the ultimate conclusion of pots of marmalade and raspberry, only serves to illustrate the ingratitude of human nature in the rough.

George Scott, who did not know much of any country save his own, and had the North-of-Irelander's hatred of muddle and uncleanness, did not take Figg's in the humorous style which was the only way to accept it. He had come straight out from London to Papua, with only a call or two for coal-ing, in a cargo boat that had been bought by a trading company for working the New Guinea coasts. Missing, in this manner, the magnificent procession of all the wonders of the kingdoms of the earth, enjoyed by the traveller who takes the

recognised Red Sea route, and stops at all the ports, Scott came upon Papua as a somewhat unseasoned traveller. The scenery was certainly beyond anything he had ever imagined, but he did not think, on the whole, it made up for the eccentricities of the Federal. However, there was no room in any other hotel at the time, since Samarai was just then enjoying a wave of prosperity caused by the development of a new goldfield: in fact, he saw he was lucky to have secured even the half room he had got.

It is time to say a word about George Scott. If you have ever visited the North of Ireland, you have met many men a little like him, but none quite the same—one does not pick George Scotts off every family tree. He had the tall stature of the Ulsterman; his eyes were Northern grey, his features well marked and almost hard, save for the mouth, which was slightly retreating and soft in outline. You knew, looking at that delicate mouth forced into firmness, at the too-fine and silky brown hair, at the slight stoop of the broad shoulders, that the profession of George Scott, and the strength of George Scott, and the existence of George Scott in general, had cost a big struggle, somewhere and somewhen.

They had. A lad of delicate upbringing and strength none too great, flung at seventeen out of a luxurious life into the poverty that lurks always underneath the splendour of mercantile Belfast, George Scott had gone through the hell that only "workmen apprentices" of his kind and class can

know. In the bitter winter days he had risen at five o'clock to get to his workshop by six: had gone short of food and of fire, while his half-grown frame was struggling desperately to keep up with the tale of crushing labour laid upon it: had trudged black-faced and overall-clad through streets that used to see him in hunting kit, riding his fine Galway mare to the meet of the county staghounds. He had worn his way, he never knew how, afoot through illnesses that would have sent most men to bed for weeks: had been always tired for years, always short of tobacco and tram money, generally out at elbows in clothes. He had had more than his share of the inevitable cruel accidents of a foundry, and had not been able to lay up when they occurred. At the last he had worked through: the race with poverty and sickness was won. George Scott was a man, and a very strong one: instead of a box of bones in the Upper Falls burying-ground. The workman apprentice life of Belfast means one or other to most gently nurtured lads.

He had his trade now, and had been making a living at it for some years. The life he had led had not coarsened him: not one of the oaths that had rained about him like fiery hail from a volcano for four long years clung to his own lips now that he was free. He was temperate and well-living: his manners were the manners of the class in which he had been born and educated. The only notable trace of those cruel early years left upon the man

of twenty-eight was his smile. That was the hard, bright smile of one who has made himself laugh at hardship for so long that he cannot drop the habit.

Scott smiled a great deal. The man to whom life has come easy, glooms, or presents a mask of wax to the world. It costs heart's blood to learn smiling of that particular kind.

Men liked Scott, and he liked most people, to a certain point. You had to know him a good while before you fully understood that his pleasant manner and his frank talk masked a reserve deep and cold as the grey-green strait of Stranraer. There was a woman who had the right to touch the bottom of that unplumbed sea, but neither she, nor anyone else, had ever done so. Scott was one of the men who seldom let themselves go.

What, then, was a Belfast engineer doing in this galley—what had brought Scott to Samarai? His room-mate had some notion: no one else on the island knew. Mr. Clay had not told quite the truth to Dence and Anderson, out under the casuarina tree. He had omitted one very important fact, which was, that he had not seen the paper at all, but had felt it—with his hand inside Scott's pyjamas, when the newcomer was asleep. Clay had argued that men who had lived in the North of Ireland all their lives don't wake at a light touch, in the heart of the five o'clock slumber. Men who had lived in places like Papua do.

The Sydney man had not dared to pull the packet

out, but with his thin small fingers he had felt it, until he was satisfied that it was a single folded paper in a sheet of oiled silk—not notes or gold. He had guessed at the existence immediately Scott began to undress, by a certain awkwardness the latter betrayed in taking off his clothes. As to the map, well, Scott was undoubtedly tracing something out with a pencil on it, a route to something or somewhere. And he had asked Clay if the boat for the Kikiramu field was leaving soon. Clay's employers were the agents for the little coasting steamer, so the question was natural enough. Also, it was natural that Scott should ask if there were any miners in Samarai. But, taking all these circumstances together, Clay thought he smelt something interesting. His diplomacy had broken short off at the crucial point, as it generally did. Still, that left him none the less sure that he was right.

CHAPTER II

"I TELL you," said Anderson, setting down his glass with some emphasis, "that if he was eaten, it was entirely his own fault. The country's as safe as Sydney Botanical Gardens—safer. Pass the pickles."

"They're done," said the man next him, a grey-haired, grey-bearded old fellow in a black flannel shirt. "Have chutney. As to his being eaten, it wasn't even proved. None of the bones was split to get the marrow out. As likely as not he was only knocked on the head."

"Exactly," agreed Anderson. "Making a fuss and a row and a scandal out of nothing, as usual. Those Sydney newspapers ought to know a little better this time. I've always said, and I say again, that when a man does get eaten, it's due to foolery of one kind or another. It never ought to happen, and never does, to anyone who has any sense. But to hear people down south talk, you'd think a man couldn't go out for a week prospecting without getting spitted on a stick and roasted alive."

"There wasn't above six diggers in the whole of New Guinea that that ever happened to—at least, that it was proved to have happened to," com-

mented the old man, in a voice somewhat muffled with tinned-meat pie.

"Why, Bodkin," put in Rupert Dence from the other side of the table, "you know you had a pretty narrow escape yourself."

The old man swallowed his mouthful hastily, put down his knife and fork, and half rose to his feet.

"I had not," he said, in a voice quivering with anger. "Nothing of the kind. It's a lie—who says so—who dared to tell you anything of the kind? You've been talking to tourists, you have—blank tourists. A-aah, New Guinea's ruined, rotten ruined, since they let them sort come nosing about with their cameras and their picture-books and their double-blank nonsense, talking thrash!"

A strong South of Ireland accent was beginning to work out with the warmth of his anger, as a worn inscription shows up on heated metal.

"It was not throe, I tell ye. It was nothing at all. Them Orokivas, years and years ago, I will not deny it, got me away by force with one of their war parties, and kep' me in the village for a couple or three days; but what was that? Sure, amn't I telling you I got away all right, and, moreover, I recruited nineteen boys out of that same village not a year after."

"Come, now, Terry, they broke all your arms and legs, and left you in a stream to make the meat tender—you know they did," teased Anderson.

Bodkin, who had taken his seat again, jumped up once more, and dashed his fork on the cloth.

"May the devil choke ye, Joe Anderson," he said, "but you know well they never did. I won't deny it's their custom; but what was it they done on me? broke an arm accidental, when the scrap was goin' on, nothing more, if I was to die to-morrow. Aren't ye ashamed of yourself, to be givin' up your impudence to a man who's done with the fighting, and can't drive your ugly alligator eyes out of your secon'-hand doormat head?"

There was a laugh at this, for Anderson's eyes were as undeniably green as his hair was rudely luxuriant.

"Let him alone, Joe," advised Dence, who had taken advantage of the dispute to possess himself of the one ripe granadilla on the table, and was rapidly and quietly getting through it unobserved. "You'll get the worst of it, Bodkin; keep your hair on, and finish your dinner. It's too hot to argue."

It certainly was. Scott, seated at the next table, coatless, like everyone else, and with his sleeves rolled up to the elbow, paused now and then in his dinner to mop his wet forehead, and to envy the native boys who were serving the meal. A costume consisting only of a scarlet cotton kilt, some bead necklaces, and a row of white flowers stuck like pins into the depths of the huge mass of brown woolly hair, seemed sensible and desirable on this breathless night.

The room was fairly large, and had as many doors and windows as a scene in a French farce: they were all wide open, and through their spaces one could see dark palms and pawpaws standing up like black paper cuttings on a purple velvet background. There were stars visible among the spaces of the boughs, but they looked hot and still. A violent scent from the invisible pawpaw flowers, and from frangipanis a little farther off, mingled with the odours of cookery and the faint exhalations of the bar. Along the coral sand of the main street outside bare feet scuffled by continually: the square of light thrown out by the open door framed strange, wild pictures, passing from dark to dark like the figures in a cinematograph show—big, brown, naked men, with immense woolly heads full of feathers and flowers, dog-tooth necklaces, and gay red and yellow leaves thrust into their fibre-woven armlets and anklets: house-boys taking the evening air, proudly costumed in a waistcoat and a cuff: women from the mainland villages swinging their full short crinolines of ribbony leaves as they walked, and playing with their neck-chains of scarlet shell-money: a youth from the wild outer islands, who had just drawn up his carved and shell-enamelled canoe on the beach, and was peeping with astounded eyes at the wonderful white men and their wonderful food. . . .

“By Jove, that fellow’s wearing a human jaw round his neck,” broke out Scott, dropping the

piece of sweet potato on his fork, and staring at the door.

The man from the outer islands, seeing himself looked at, melted away like a dissolving view into the darkness.

Anderson, at the next table, answered the exclamation, apparently out of civility.

"Yes; that'll be a Trobriand boy, I should think. They often wear jaws."

"Why?" asked Scott, turning his chair a little, so as to face the other man.

"Oh, I think as a kind of memorial of the dead. Sort of locket. Not a piece of an enemy, as a rule. The Trobrianders aren't cannibals."

"There's a good deal of it still elsewhere, judging by what you were saying just now," commented Scott.

"There's a lot of nonsense talked about that," said the other, and returned to his dinner. Scott became conscious that all the men at the table were quietly taking him in. None of them stared rudely, but keen covert glances were flying like arrows. On his part he wondered greatly who or what these men might be—these beings who were so various in dress, manner, and (apparently) in social position, yet who bore each one a likeness to the other, and who were all alike in their callous way of regarding death and danger. The young engineer had seen pluck enough in his own profession, but this was something of another kind.

After dinner the men drifted off into the bar, and Scott, led by curiosity, followed them. He wanted to study them, and he wanted, by and by, to ask them if there were any gold-miners in Samarai. Business must not be forgotten in the midst of all these strange new sights and interests.

It was, if possible, hotter in the bar. Twenty or thirty men were crowded about the counter, leaning on it and talking. Most of them were of the same type as those who had occupied the table next Scott's at dinner. He recognised it at once, but he could not put a name to it. It began to worry him. What was it that these men had in common? What gave them all alike that unnameable look in the eyes—a look that spoke of distances, of solitudes, of ghastly things seen long ago and forgotten—that deliberate way of moving, that inexpressive, outward-looking countenance? Now that he looked at the men more closely, he was struck also by their strength. They were none of them young: most were middle-aged, and some were actually old—but they were bundles of hard, sinewy muscle, every one, and the slight stoop that most of them had detracted little from a certain independence of carriage, almost approaching a swagger, that the engineer had never seen in any man who could not hold his own with the best.

Observation, however, seemed likely to stop short where it had begun. There was something reserved and unapproachable in the manner of the men that

held back the stranger from any attempt at rushing their acquaintance. Big Anderson, towering over even the sturdy Belfast man by a good two inches of height, seemed the only possible bridge of approach. Scott felt this, without knowing why: the fact was, that Anderson, knowing more than the rest, was waiting to be approached.

A word or two about the heat of the night made a beginning: the inevitable invitation to drink carried it on. Over a glass of whiskey that was good enough to explain the carelessness of Figg's in other matters—why worry about clean sheets and decent table service if you had the one thing that really mattered?—Scott found a chance of putting his question.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but I wish you could tell me—are there any miners in Samarai? I want to meet some of them."

At this every man in the bar turned round and looked at him, glass in hand.

"We're all miners here," said Anderson briefly.

Scott said nothing, but he felt himself gaping. He had rarely been more surprised. Some of the men began to laugh.

"Bret Harte again!" remarked Anderson, half shutting his sharp green eyes, with a wearied expression. "You're disappointed, aren't you? If we had known you were coming we'd have had all the stage properties to please you—put bullet-holes through your shirt-cuffs, and gambled with nuggets on the pudding-plates, and shot a man on the veran-

dah after dinner. Not even a red shirt or a pair of knee-boots! Too bad, isn't it? We do disappoint the tourists so!"

"But I'm not a tourist," said Scott. "I'm going to try my luck on the goldfields myself."

"Do you know anything about the country?" asked Anderson.

"No," said Scott.

"Anything about mining?"

"No." The second "no" came easier. Anderson's green eyes seemed boring into his face. They made him uncomfortable, and yet—he was telling the truth. Was he not? He assured himself that he was, though perhaps not the whole truth.

"Have you enough money to take a team of boys with you?" asked the big miner.

"I think so," answered the Northerner cautiously. "Is that necessary?"

"Yes. The white man can't do his own work in this country."

Scott experienced a shock of astonishment. That such men as these could not do any work, anywhere, seemed scarcely credible. He inwardly resolved to see for himself before making up his mind. But he said nothing. It became incumbent on him to offer Anderson a drink, and he did so, leaving his own as nearly untouched as he could. These men seemed to drink strong spirit like water, but Scott's nervous system was not of the type that requires such fiery spurs.

Under his breath he said to himself—

“Miners! Well, I’m blown!”

He really had expected something of the kind suggested by the mocking giant at his side. And if you think that a hard-headed young Irish engineer out on an adventurous trip is not likely to cherish story-book fancies, ask yourself if the dog chained up in the yard all week is likely, or not likely, to run hard and far when Sunday morning loosens his collar for him.

The whiskey, which seemed to have no power to affect anyone’s head as yet, had at all events loosened tongues, and a river of bush and mining talk began to flow. Scott listened, evading as well as he could the too-hospitable invitations that began to shower down on him, but finding himself nevertheless constrained to drink more than he cared for. The bar-room grew unnaturally bright: small shiny waves seemed floating in the air. The voices roared like surf on a pebbly shore.

“ . . . What did he die of? Beri-beri, they reckoned—unlucky thing; those meat-ants seem to have got at him before he was found, and . . . That time Whitman was up at Carpet-Snake: he never did know how to manage his boys, and they ran away from him, and it was just then that he lit on payable stuff—tried to work it himself with an extra dose of dynamite, but he didn’t give the fuse time, and if the Government survey party hadn’t chanced across, he’d never have got down to Samarai with one hand

and a foot and a half: been crawling along for days, when they found him. . . . Oh no, Coppinger's boys never ran away,—they liked him all right,—the trouble was that they got scrapping when he went down to the store for a few days, and as they were all man-eaters, and came from different villages, they went 'kavakava' when he wasn't there to keep them in order, and so, of course, when he got back again, he found they'd mostly eaten each other up, and he had to start out and recruit some more. . . . Kukukus? Never attacked me, not once: anyone who says so is talking through his hat. Came round the camp sometimes and threw spears at us: nothing else. . . . Well, I tell you, when that boy came up out of the creek he was spangled all over with gold like a blooming Christmas cake: dropping off him it was—so that's how they found it out. . . ."

"When do you reckon to start?" asked a voice out of the mist.

Scott felt clear enough in his head to answer: "As soon as I can."

"Did you ever hear of *Punch's* 'Advice to Those About to Marry'?" went on the voice—Anderson's apparently.

"Yes; it was 'Don't.'"

"Exactly," said the voice, which certainly had an acid flavour now, unnoticeable before—but perhaps it was not real: perhaps . . .

("I had better get out of this," said Scott to himself.)

The voice went on.

"You've time to quit yet. Think again, I'd advise you."

"Why?" asked Scott, with a perfectly clear enunciation. (He was glad of that.)

Anderson's mood suddenly changed. He gave a loud, hard laugh, and moved off.

"Oh, why, indeed? Why should I trouble, anyhow?" he said. And if the bright waves in the air had been a little less dazzling, Scott could have found brain to think that the bitterness of the tone was more unmistakable than ever—could even have guessed that it spoke of loss. . . . What had Anderson lost in that wilderness to which he himself was hurrying? Lost? He was thinking nonsense: his head must really be going.

The soft, cultivated tone of Rupert Dence rose beside him.

"Anderson's right," it said. "But you won't mind him: no one does mind that sort of thing. I shall be drunk to-night, but if you will look me up to-morrow, I shall be delighted to give you any pointers that I can."

"Thank you very much," replied Scott, wondering whether he, or the other, was a little mad.

There was no more of Dence then, and no more of Anderson, but many flannel-shirted men, with soft hats jammed tight down on their heads, talked for years about recruiting, and ground-sluices, and flumes, and something that they called "the wash."

("It does not mean a wash of clothes," explained Scott to himself, with immense seriousness—"they are talking of the working of the mines.") It seemed possible to get away now, and he began edging to the door, congratulating himself on having kept his head.

"All right after all," he said. And then—"No, by Jove, I'm not—if I've begun seeing things that aren't here." He looked behind the bar in some dismay. The stout man who had been serving drinks was gone, Scott knew not when or how, and in his place stood a girl. There was nothing remarkable about this, but it was remarkable, or something more, that she should be refined and cultivated-looking, an unmistakable gentlewoman—in the roughest bar of the roughest town in New Guinea—and as to her looks . . .

"It has gone to my head," decided Scott in some dismay. "No girl is as beautiful as that—even if she were there, and I'm not even sure she is. . . . I've got to get out of this."

Without any apparent interval of stairs he found himself in his own room. He felt aggrieved with himself, as he got to bed, though there seemed no bodily effect from his excess. But his head was undeniably affected.

"It's been an impossible sort of day, but she's the crowning impossibility," he thought, as his mosquito curtain dropped. "They are not as pretty. They certainly are not." He fell asleep.

Some hours later, Mr. Clay, emboldened by previous immunity, and making a second try after the packet, found himself knocked through the door into the verandah by something like the kick of a horse.

"You change your room, my son," advised a voice from under a wrecked mosquito curtain. "I'll have to take your net, and I don't feel inclined for company, anyway."

Clay picked himself up, and went off without even an oath. He went, indeed, as silently as a native dog. Those who know the native dog will tell you that when it does this, you had better keep a guard over your heels for a while.

Scott turned over and went to sleep again.

"The brute woke me when I was dreaming about her!" he said, as his eyes closed.

But next morning she had so nearly passed away from his mind that he did not even look in at the door of the bar as he went downstairs.

It showed the young Irishman's sense and sobriety alike that he did not worry about his small lapse of the previous night, but merely decided to turn total abstainer for the term of his stay in Papua. Abstinence cost him nothing, as he knew by experience, and there was clearly no middle way among men who could drink as the miners did. Moreover, he had not obtained any of the information he really wanted, and he had been rather nearer talking about his own affairs than he liked.

Half an hour after breakfast he had found a

comparatively shady and very quiet spot up on the top of the island—a little glade in the heart of a cocoanut-grove, surrounded by low-swinging, glittering fronds that framed, and veiled, and hid, and showed again the jewelled wonders of the straits that lay below. Up here not a roof of the little tin-built town could be seen, not even a turn of the coral path. One might have been alone on Robinson Crusoe's island, with the wreck going to pieces on the beach below.

Here Scott sat down on the grass, after a careful search for scorpions or centipedes, pulled a paper out of his clothes, and spread it on his knees. It was a map of Papua, such as may be bought in Melbourne for a shilling or two. Some of the rivers were marked with pencil lines, and here and there there was a note of interrogation. He studied the map for a while, then took out a letter, much like other letters, save for the circumstance of its being carefully mounted on a linen backing, and looked at that too. Finally, he put the letter into its case, and slipped the case inside his shirt, where it hung by a cord.

"A partner it must be," he said, and fell a-whistling softly.

It cannot be denied that Nature sometimes plays theatrical tricks. Quite after the best traditions of the stage was the incident that followed. From the sloping side of the hill, some little way off, there appeared first the head and then the entire figure

of Mr. Rupert Dence, in a very clean white suit, with a calm and sober expression on his face, and a cigarette held daintily between two fingers. It was he who had organised the dog-fight in the dining-room which had disturbed Scott's early slumbers on the night before, and certain smashed glass doors also were connected with Mr. Dence's ideas of expressing the joy of living at two o'clock in the morning. But no one would have thought it, to see him advancing down-stage through that very theatrical-looking glade of palms, with the air of a somewhat damaged *jeune premier* on the lookout for the leading lady, smiling, smart, and sociable.

Scott, in his workman days, had been the best foreman of a gang that ever the M'Aherin ironworks had known. His judgment of men, if not instantaneous, was quick and safe.

"This man will do," he thought. "Away from hotels he'll keep right. He doesn't care a hang what I think of him, and he has pluck—they all have, for the matter of that. It has to be someone: I might go farther and fare worse than this."

The two men met, and Dence made no pretence of having come up by accident.

"Good-morning! I followed you," he said. "I meant to put you up to something about that roommate of yours."

"Did you see him to-day?" asked Scott, getting up.

"Only in the distance: he seemed inclined to

skulk—looked as if there was something the matter with his face.”

“ Exactly. You see you needn’t trouble.”

Dence laughed. “ I see I needn’t,” he said.

A momentary silence fell. Dence smoked delicately, enjoying his cigarette, which was of a brand not common in the South Seas. He knew by now that Scott had something to say to him.

CHAPTER III

IT was very quiet on the top of the island. Below, on the windward side, the reef roared faintly, far away. You could just hear the rattle of the *Matunga's* winches, down in the invisible harbour, as she unloaded her cargo. But it seemed almost silent up here, alone with the wind and the palms.

"I've got to have a partner," said Scott, lifting his eyes to Dence's face and fixing him with a steady look.

The man with a hidden history and a false name met that look fairly. It waked a pinching pain somewhere or other in his battered personality: there had been a time, though he could scarce believe it now, when he too was twenty-something; steady and straight and diamond-clear down to the bottom of his young soul. . . . Those waters were muddied now. Still, he could answer the unspoken question honestly.

The eyes of English blue and the eyes of Northern grey read each other for a pregnant instant. Then Scott stretched out his hand, with an action as deliberate as the signing of a bond. Dence took it, and the rough pressure he gave was his promise.

"I've come here on business," said Scott.
"I——"

"Stop a bit," said the other, letting himself down on the grass and leaning against a palm-trunk. "I begin to think there was something after all in what that reptile Clay said to Anderson and myself. We didn't pay much attention to him: we only thought he was spyin' about because it was his nature to, and I had an idea you might be carryin' your money on your person—so I meant to give you a hint. But let me tell you what he said."

Scott, seated on the grass alongside, with his pipe going, listened, and nodded his head once or twice.

"Not so far out," he said, when the recital was done. "I'm sorry it happened: I did think I was old enough to take care of myself. But I never supposed the little rat would get feeling about when I was asleep—one is only on one's guard about money, as a rule, and I have mine in drafts. I don't suppose I need worry, however."

Dence did not answer immediately.

"No—I don't suppose you need," he said by and by. The subject dropped.

"What I have come here for," said George Scott, "is to make money. I feel as if I'd give my life for ten years of a decent income. I've had a bitter hard time of it, and I wasn't brought up to want, worse luck. Engineering's my job—just the common or garden mechanical kind: I've been running a sort of small repairing business in Belfast, and making bread and butter at it, but . . . There's a

time in a fellow's life when he wants more—one begins to see all the good things there are in the world, and kick because you haven't your share. And there's where the 'get-rich-quick' madness comes in. And especially if . . . there's someone else to think of. She ought to have her share—and there's no one but you to get it for her. And that makes you feel worse."

He picked at the grass under his hands. He had been born with the curse of the nervous temperament, and had trampled it under his feet as St. George trampled the dragon; but microscopic traces still lived.

"I couldn't think of any way to do it," he said. "Without capital there's nothing in any sort of engineering but an endless grind—a fair income, perhaps, when you're forty, but that's too far away. I wouldn't try any wild-cat schemes with the little bit I had. I used to think, and think, but I couldn't see my way out. And Belfast's a town where it's simple hell to be poor.

"Well, it came by chance—it's like a fairy-tale. I was gathering together what I could in the way of furniture, bit by bit, a chair here, and a set of shelves there—and one day I was hanging out at a pawnbroker's sale, trying to pick up an ornament or so, when they put up a miscellaneous lot—a Chinese vase, a foreign basket or two, some shells, and a New Guinea bamboo pipe, poker-worked by the natives. The lot went very cheap, and as I wanted

the vase I took it. When I got the things home, I brushed them up, and they didn't look half bad. The pipe——”

“Bau-bau, it's called.”

“Is it? thanks—well, I thought it a very rummy-looking thing, as it hadn't an opening that I could see, and I wanted to find out how it was smoked. I found a little hole in one side that smelt of smoke, so I guessed it was done by sticking the tobacco in that, and letting the smoke fill up the bamboo. I had a fancy then to try it myself, so I cut a bit of plug, and was going to stick it in and light it, when I heard something rattle inside, held it up to the light, and saw something like a little wad of paper. Well, I began to wonder: I didn't think the savages of New Guinea had paper, and I couldn't make out what they wanted putting bits in to spoil their smoke if they had. I went at it with a bit of wire, but I couldn't hook it out—the wad seemed to have been forced in through the hole, and it had spread afterwards. I was getting a bit curious, so I threw a sixpence—heads I break up the pipe, tails I let it alone. And it came to heads. And that's why I'm here to-day.”

The south-east hummed in the palm trees: the rattling of winches down below in the invisible harbour went on. Dence listened to the tale, and saw, as he listened, many things, in many strange corners of the world, that had nothing at all to do with the saga of George Scott. You, who have roamed the

world, what does the rattling of those cargo winches say to you?

"It may be—nothing," went on Scott, "or it may be something very big. Anyhow, I thought it good enough to sell my little repair business and clear out for this country with every penny I had. I've been wild at myself a dozen times for doing it—and yet—a man can't always be prudent. And—the—the girl I'm engaged to—was as—as plucky as old boots about it. I told her, though I didn't tell anyone else, and she just said, 'Go, and if you come back a beggar——' "

Another break. Rupert Dence, who knew himself born to receive the confidences of other men, by many experiences in many climes, said nothing at all.

"'. . . I'll get two beggars' sacks, and we'll make bread-puddings of the crusts from the back-doors, and eat them together,' she said."

Scott shut his mouth on this, and looked very hard at the violet mass of Basilisk Island shouldering up behind tall green Sariba.

"So I went," he said presently. "It's something about gold, and it seems to be a good thing. But there's one thing quite clear to me from the talk I heard last night, and that is, that I must have a partner. I don't know the first thing about mining. What do you think about joining me? If we agree, I can show you the paper, and we'll discuss shares afterwards."

"There are one or two things you ought to know

first," said Rupert Dence, in the drawling English accent that contrasted so sharply with the crisp, clipped tone of the Ulsterman. "First, I drink. I drink a lot when I'm in Samarai or Port Moresby. I'm not in the least likely to stop, couldn't if I would, probably, and certainly don't mean to try."

"Do you talk when you drink?" asked Scott.

Over the tanned face and neck of Rupert Dence, false-named, unclassed, a slow deep red crept up.

"I did, once in my life," he said.

Then, after a pause—

"I never did again."

"I'm no missionary," said Scott. "We can let it go at that. If that's all you have to——"

"Not quite. I've been diggin' on the Kikiramu lately, in the big camps—so far as Papua ever has a camp. I used to dig in Misima: island away off the south-east coast. I went clean native there: some of them do. Wore nothin' but a waist-cloth, almost forgot how to talk, drank kava till my eyes nearly gave out, and I got a worse kind of jumps than any whiskey can give you. Killed a Papuan or two, without cause that a jury would have found sufficient. I'm a bad lot all round: so the respectable people of Papua would tell you—there are lots of respectable people in Papua now, since it became Australian. Some of us liked the old Crown Colony days a good deal the best. Well, 'dost thou like the picture?' "

"Yes, all right," persisted Scott. "That's your funeral, not mine. If I might ask, why . . ."

"Joe Anderson, that's why," said the other, as Scott paused in some embarrassment. "Anderson went down to Misima, looked me up in the bush, fitted me out with clothes, and did the prodigal father business—or wasn't it the son that was prodigal? Anyhow, Anderson took me off up the Kikiramu with himself. And we both did fairly well. And I spent the result—as I always do. I always will. Now you know."

"Anything more?"

"Yes. One thing more. Don't go at all."

"Why in—Hades—not?"

"Oh, you'll go—but you'd better not. Papua'll get hold of you. It gets us all. There isn't a man in the country who doesn't and didn't mean to go away again—and they don't. It's the funniest thing in the world. Every government officer, when he's goin' south on leave, tells you, as a startlin' novelty, that he means to get another job, and stay in Australia. And the B.P. salesmen, when they go, tell you they mean to get themselves put on an Australian branch. And the planters are always goin' to settle in Tasmania or New Zealand. And the miners—well, the miners—we're the most shockin' case of the lot. Ten, and twenty, yes, and five-and-twenty years some of us have been here,—always goin' to go away. Whoever else goes, you may take your solemn oath we don't. You see, it's two things have got us—Papua and the little yellow specks. If the one holds like a crab, the other

holds like a devil-fish with eight arms and two feelers and a beak. We've no homes; we've no wives—to speak of: and you may take that sentence just how you like—we've no peace, no rest, not as much comfort as a decent dog in a decent kennel: we've done with everything that makes life worth living: we're buried, like that old Johnnie in the 'Idylls' that Vivien shut up in the hollow oak:

“ . . . dead
And lost to life and name, and love and fame.”

And—we go on.”

“Why?” asked Scott, fascinated.

“The little yellow specks,” laughed Dence. “There, I've been gassin' quite long enough. Your play.”

“I should say I've done enough gassing, too,” answered the other. “You may believe me, or you may not, but I never talked so much about myself to any man living as I've done to you this morning.”

“Well, don't hate me for it to-morrow,” said Dence acutely. “You're almost feeling that way now.”

It was partly true, but Scott laughed the feeling off and returned to the main point.

“Business!” he said. “I may be asking you to help me hunt up a mare's nest: it isn't proved so far that what I know is of any value. But, assuming that it is, and assuming also that my little bit of money turns out enough, will you join in with me?”

Rupert Dence was chewing a piece of palm frond thoughtfully. He took it out of his mouth and threw it down beside the stump of his finished cigarette.

"Assumin' that you don't develop any objections later to goin' partners with a drunkard and a scallywag—and assumin' that you aren't barkin' up an empty tree—yes, I'll join."

"Now for the paper I found in the—what is it? the bau-bau," said Scott, fumbling in his case.

He felt no reluctance to part with his secret now. George Scott was cautious, like most of his race, but he had none of the mean secrecies of a petty nature. Either he trusted, or he did not. Here, instinct told him to be open—here, with the "drunkard and scallywag," whom he had chosen for his working partner. It was a curious situation for one of the most respectable young men of the most respectable city in the most godly and conventional province of Ireland—but the Papuan sun and moon were to look down on stranger situations yet, with George Scott entangled therein.

Dence took the paper from his hand and read it, not aloud. Scott followed him over his shoulder.

"KIKIRAMU RIVER, PAPUA,
Sometime in January, 19—.

"DEAR GIL,—You and I have been good mates for years through good and bad times, now the end has come for me. I am writing this with death at hand, I never recovered from the spear wound I

told you about. Thinking how you saved my life in that trip up the Mambare helps me in my effort to write, as I know if you receive this you will find more gold than you ever dreamed of. Gil, old fellow, I found what we always thought was there, the reef that shed the gold in the creek where we last worked together, you will remember, where the python caught our dog, at that place there is a large boulder in the stream showing about three feet above water, when the river is very low a granite boulder is exposed for about 8 inches; keep those boulders in line and go west up the sidling until you come to the same sort of a tree that we made our box out of at Alligator Creek. From the tree go 30 points north of east 260 paces, and you will come to a diorite rock outcropping the edge of the conglomerate, examine the rock. I need not tell you anything more, I hope this gets into no other hands than yours, but have written carefully so that if it goes astray it will profit no one else, you will understand later. I send this down to the coast with my best boy, and hope it will reach T. I. all right, and now good-bye, we have had our last trip together.—Your old mate,

“HARRY CRIPPS.”

“I was sorry for the poor beggar that wrote it when I read it,” said Scott. “It’s a pathetic sort of letter. I traced up where it came from, and found that ‘Gil’ was dead—it was not nearly as much trouble finding out as one would have thought: I got at the man who pawned the curios: he was a steward on one of the B.I.’s who had lost his berth and come over to Belfast to look for work: pawned his small goods of various kinds, and was not at all secretive

as to where they came from. The bau-bau, it seems, he picked up in Thursday Island, at the sale of a dead miner's things in some hotel: the miner had gone off rather suddenly with black-water fever, and they sold his luggage to pay his bill. The steward had no idea there was anything in the pipe. I didn't feel bound to let him into the thing, but I dare say I should never have taken the thing up at all if the person called Gil hadn't been dead. I judged that he had not had time to make any use of the paper—you see, the date is this year, and it's only August now—he seems to have hidden it away, and then been surprised by death, as Cripps himself was.”

“I can tell you who Gil was,” said Dence thoughtfully; “it was a fellow called Gilbert Davidson, who was always a mate of Cripps’. They went prospecting together in a lot of places. Yes, Cripps died up the Kikiramu in January last. . . . The reef! Have you any idea what kind of a thing you’ve got hold of, man?”

“Not the least,” said Scott promptly.

“Well, it would take me half an hour to explain to you, in your present state of beastly ignorance; but just take it from me that if Cripps did get on to a good payin’ reef, he’s done what no miner on the mainland has done yet, though we dream of it all night, and talk of it half the day, when we’ve anyone to talk to—which we haven’t, as a rule: that’s why most of us are mad: you may have noticed it. They have got the reef in Woodlark Island, but it

takes big machinery to work there. If I read right, Cripps has got the kind of thing they used to get in West Australia—gold like plums in a puddin'. Oh, hang it, man, it's enough to make a dog sick to see you takin' it as coolly as all that—do you know what you've got? ”

“ No: I told you that before. What the mischief would I be wanting a partner for if I did? Go easy: there's no royal road to it that I can see. What about the puzzle part? ”

“ Hang the puzzle part. Cripps had been readin' penny novels, and they went to his head—that can be worked out—somehow—anyhow. By Jove, old man, you've hit it with this! ”

And the representative of imperturbable England smacked the son of emotional Ireland on the back. Scott grinned his hard, bright smile.

“ I see rocks ahead,” he said. “ But I'm game to try.”

The two partners went down the hill together towards the hotel. As they crossed the pathway a girl came towards them, walking fast, as if for exercise. She was of medium height, with an extremely pretty figure, and small narrow feet. Her beechnut-brown hair broke round her little pointed face like a sea-wave breaking on a pearl-white coral shore. She had the features of the typical pretty girl, the shortish, straight nose, brief upper lip, and curved small mouth, familiar on posters and magazine covers—indeed, there were quite a number of men, in various

places, who cherished different advertisements and magazine fancy heads because they were so like her. Her eyes, when you got a good look at them, made you think of dark heather honey—perhaps because of their colour, perhaps because they were almost cloyingly sweet. She looked just a little sad, just a little timid: if you were a man, you would badly want to know the meaning of that look, so that you could go immediately and break the head of anyone who had caused it. She was, in fine, that most dangerous explosive—a woman who draws the hearts of men. And, like almost all of her royal clan, she looked as though the crown weighed heavy and the gold were hard.

“I say—is that the girl who was in the bar last night?” inquired Scott, as soon as she was past.

“She is,” answered Dence, in a tone that was just a shade over-careless. “She’s the new barmaid.”

“Barmaid? in Figg’s? Why, man, she’s a lady!”

“Certainly. What else did you think she was?” asked the other, bristling a little.

“Well, one hardly expects—— What’s she doing here?”

“You might ask her: she’s paid to talk to anyone.”

“What’s her name, I wonder?”

“Ducane—Charmian Ducane,” Dence spoke very clearly.

“Ducane—Du—— Where have I heard it before? Was she ever on the stage?”

"Not to my knowledge."

"Well, I believe I've heard the name somewhere," said Scott, dismissing the struggle to remember. "She's most uncommonly pretty."

"So people think. Do you mind telling me just how much money you can raise for that trip? It isn't an affair of twopence-halfpenny in this country, I warn you."

"Come up to my room, and we'll talk it over," suggested Scott.

The incredibly pretty girl had passed out of his mind again. Instead, with a talk of money cropping up again, he saw the vision that he and a certain Janie M'Crum of Malone Road, Belfast, had sketched out together, on many a cold, firelit evening—a little villa residence with a front lawn and a back garden, somewhere about the Balmoral suburbs, velvet chairs and sofa in the drawing-room, leather in the dining-room, a moderate-priced run-about motor in the little garage, trips to Portrush every August, Dublin for the horse-show . . . many, many firelit evenings, when nobody should go home, because everyone would be at home . . . little fair heads about the garden, in the sunny mornings . . .

Scott swallowed down his vision with a sigh. They were at the hotel now. And the vision, somehow or other, did not cling that night. Perhaps he had thought about it too often, and grown almost tired waiting.

. . . Over Sariba and Basilisk Island the light slunk away. Purple and blood-crimson, fierce with struggling Titans, and wild with giant fortresses crashing down to fiery ruin, the strange New Guinea sunset began to burn above the blackening ranges. And high in the west, like the crystal lamp of Edith the Swan-Necked, searching for the body of her lover on Senlac's bloody field, Love's star shone down upon the crimson death of day.

. . . Does one love in villa residences in a Belfast suburb, with a good and gentle Janie M'Crum tending the velvet drawing-room furniture, as one might love beneath the burning skies of Papua—Papua, where hearts are strong to dare, and hate, and love, and where the tiny twinkling planet of the North becomes the great bright queen of the tropic world?

If anyone asked the question of himself that night it found no answer.

CHAPTER IV

THERE was no moonlight that night.

This was fortunate, because a gentleman who climbs upon a roof to listen to the conversation of other gentlemen naturally prefers darkness. It was very dark, and no one saw Mr. Clay slip round to the back of the house, shin up a verandah post, and get on to the wide, easily sloping iron roof that covered the nest of partitioned cells known as Figg's Federal Hotel.

In the outback hotels of Australasia and the Pacific you will almost always find that a bedroom means little more than a sort of cubicle partitioned off at a height of some eight or nine feet from the other compartments under the same roof. There are sometimes one or two rooms completely walled off from the rest, sometimes none. Figg's had one: it was the room occupied by Scott, and, until lately, by Clay as well. Clay had removed his traps without protest, and taken himself completely out of his room-mate's sight, in the hope that Scott would forget all about him. Which Scott, being interested in other things, naturally did.

But in the heart of Clay there now burned a passion even stronger than the lust of unearned gain

that had possessed him up to this—the passion of curiosity.

The strength of that passion, in the tortuous, cloudy souls of certain creatures low in humanity's scale, is a thing for other and normal minds to wonder over speechless. There are beings who seem to live, parasitically, only on the blood of other minds. Clay had the obsession in its worst form: the mere thought of a secret that he could, and ought to, know nothing about set the blood drumming in his ears with desire to get at it and suck the life out of it. He had a reason for wanting money at any cost that will be heard of later. But stronger now by far was the unsatisfied ache of curiosity. He had seen Scott and Rupert Dence coming back to the hotel together, suspected their conference, and chewed his nails with agony to think that he had not been there. When they went up to Scott's room together, after dinner, he slipped round to the back verandah, bare-footed, and got on the roof, swiftly and without sound. It would have been easier to go into an adjoining room and put his ear to the partition, but Clay was no novice at the game, and he guessed—rightly—that Scott or Dence would take a look into the next room before settling down to talk.

The iron roof sloped low down upon the room beneath: there was no carpet on the floor, and very little furniture to deaden sound. Lying on what was practically a vast sounding-board, Clay con-

trived to hear most of what was said almost as plainly as if he had been in the room.

They were discussing the cost of a trip to the Kikiramu River goldfield, including four or five months' prospecting in the neighbourhood. Dence put it down at £400, and this seemed to trouble Scott.

"I have £300," he said, "but I must keep a hundred back in case of failure. And even if I didn't, I shouldn't have enough, according to what you say."

"Well," said the other voice, "I can't put up a halfpenny more than I said, and that leaves me nothin' at all. D'you like to try someone else? I engage to forget all about it, if you do."

"No," came Scott's voice thoughtfully. "No; I won't do that. I think I'd like to have you in it, anyhow. It looks as if we'd have to make a syndicate of it. Rather a pity, but——"

"Anderson could just about fill the gap. That would leave two shares to you, and one each to him and myself. You can trust Anderson all right."

"I can believe that. I don't know that we can do better. I haven't taken awfully to Anderson, it's true, but that may be my fault."

"It is. Reason why you took to me like winkin' was because you knew I was weaker than yourself. Reason why you aren't takin' to Anderson first jump is because he's just about as strong a character as you are. You'd shake down together all right.

You take it from me, a fellow that anyone and everyone takes to right off, like me, is rather more likely than not to be a bloomin' waster—like me."

"I never heard anyone talk like you in all my life," declared Scott, somewhat puzzled.

"It's only because I'm so beastly clever. Don't you be clever: it's so jolly bad for your chances in life. However, I don't think you need be afraid."

"Thank you."

"Not at all. And now suppose you stop talkin' all this beastly frivolous nonsense and get down to business."

(Clay, up on the roof, shifted an uneasy leg along the hard iron ridges, and prepared to listen.)

"First thing I want to tell you is, you're up against the hardest job you've ever had, as well as the biggest payin', in this thing. You don't begin to have a notion what this country is like, in the inside—nobody has until they've seen it. You'll have to risk your life in a dozen ways: and you'll have to live harder than you ever dreamed, and you'll have to take what's comin' to you, even if it's dyin' very quickly and very nastily, without kickin' at it by so much as half a word, no matter what it is. That's what the New Guinea miner is. He kicks all the time about the Government, or the weather, or the way his neighbour's usin' up his water-power, or things of that kind—but when it's starvin', or dyin', or bein' worked all out in a way you don't know the very beginnin's of yet, or bein' smashed

up with dynamite, and havin' his mates take off an arm or a leg for him with bush-knives and no chloroform, or any little thing of that kind—why, he takes it as all in the day's work, and doesn't even know he's what people would call a brave man. There's not another man but me in the whole of the diggin's could even tell you that. They're so close to it they don't know."

There was silence in the room for a minute, and then Dence's voice recommenced.

"Well, about that reef of Cripps'. The first thing we have to do is to find out where the boys are that he employed on his trip, and get as many of them as we can. We might find out from them whereabouts he was workin'. Then we can recruit what more we want and start up the Kikiramu River, because it's evidently somewhere in that part of the country. No use tryin' to work out the puzzle part till we get there."

"It sounds simple," said Scott reflectively.

"Does it? I'm glad; you just keep on thinkin' that way as long as you can. Now I think, if you'll be good enough to excuse me, I'll go and spend the rest of the evenin' in my usual state of beastly intoxication, and you can read the last annual volume of the Reports of the Young Men's Christian Association——"

There was the sound of a trunk lid opening here, and a pause, broken only by a slight rustling of paper. Then, in Dence's voice—

"Well, I am—blessed!"

"Receipt for my last year's subscription. I'm careful about receipts."

"Well, I am——"

"So you said. They've got a good library and gymnasium, you know. And we aren't quite as Christian as you think. All the same, I go to church most Sundays. And I used to have a class in the Sunday school whenever they were shorthanded."

"Well, I am—well, they do say we're all mad here, and there was once someone who called Papua the Country of the Impossible. But a Young Man Christian—a Sunday-school teacher—among the diggers! Will you kindly let me go and get drunk at once? Good evening. See you to-morrow."

The footsteps died away on the verandah. Clay slipped like a snake from the roof to the rail and disappeared. He had heard enough to go on with. He thought he should sleep to-night.

Scott slept well, and did not dream—not even of the Malone Road on a summer's evening, with somebody beside him on the narrow top seat of the tram. But towards the morning he woke up all of a sudden and found himself sitting upright in bed. The window was wide open to the breathless night: outside, about the top of a pawpaw tree, the wings of an unseen flying-fox thrummed like the propeller of a motor-boat. The sea breathed low on the reef, very far away.

"Charmian Ducane! My God! the poisoner!"

He remembered now. He had read all about it in the home papers, just before he left. The woman who had been divorced by her husband, down in Sydney—the woman in whose jewel-case had been found a bottle of poison, cunningly designed to kill without leaving dangerous traces—the woman whose lover was a doctor, skilled in the use of uncommon drugs—the woman who had threatened to kill her husband, and had put the poison in his very glass—the woman who had not been tried for her life, because her husband had not taken the drink, but who had been divorced, under circumstances of the deepest infamy: whose name was a byword in the mouths of decent people—Charmian Ducane! Well might he think he had heard the name before. The heroine of that scandal—with an innocent, childlike face, and soft, frightened, honey-sweet eyes: the little lady he had seen walking round the island.

Well, in truth this was the Country of the Impossible, and Charmian Ducane was the most impossible thing in it.

Scott slept no more that night.

It seemed to Scott that events had been raining very fast and thick during the first day or two of his stay in the Impossible Country, but the calm came close on the heels of the storm.

He had to wait. Anderson had gone off suddenly, at half an hour's notice, in a schooner that was running down to Ferguson Island: he wanted

to recruit boys from that place, and it was not at all certain when he would return. Dence declared there was nothing to be done for the present: so the "new chum" settled down, with what patience he might, to the waiting and hanging about that are the inevitable portion of travellers in Papua.

The arrival of a mail, with letters for himself, made a welcome break. There was one from Janie: the first he had had since leaving home. He took it out with him to read at the windward cool side of the island, where there was a comfortable seat fixed on a rock looking towards China Straits. What the straits had to do with China, Scott never knew: does not know to this day. Nor did he ever find out why the authorities of Samarai had placed the typical "lovers' seat" of the island right up against the wall of the explosive magazine—unless through some symbolic fancy scarcely to be expected of a grave Government official.

Leaning up against the magazine he opened his letter and read it through. It was not a very sentimental letter: Janie was less sparing of deeds than words where her affections were concerned. It told the little happenings of her daily life: spoke of a carpet she had bought, at a reduced price, which might do for the dining-room of their house: of the Intermediate Examinations, in which her pupils (Janie was a school-teacher) had done well: of weather and mutual friends. And at the last it broke into one little wave of reminiscence:

" . . . It's summer now, and the trees are just big castles of green along the Lagan River, and sometimes of an evening I go out for a walk along the tow-path, all by myself. Last summer, when the leaves were out, it was you and I that walked along the river. I wonder will we ever walk there again? Oh, George, the men who go away never know how the women feel who have to stay behind. Do you remember the song we used to sing—'Teddy O'Neale'?—and how the colleen said good-bye 'with tears in her eyes, and a stone on her heart'? I have a stone on my heart when I think of you, and that is always.

'Says he, 'twas to better his lot he went roving,
But what would be gold to the joy I should feel
To see him return to me honest and loving,
Though poor still, my darling boy, Teddy O'Neale!'

Good-bye, my man—come back some day.—Your
"JANIE."

Scott grinned as he folded the letter and put it away. He was not in the least amused, but he had picked up a mechanical habit of smiling when he was hurt. Something in Janie's letter hurt him: he could hardly tell what.

"They trust us so," he said. "They trust us so . . ."

He looked up to see the woman from the bar coming across the narrow causeway that led to the seat.

Since that sudden awaking in the middle of the night, Scott had seen and heard almost nothing of Charmian Ducane. He had not been into the bar again, and the girl was seldom seen about. In truth,

he had not had a good look at her, save on the day when he had met her out walking. He had thought about her a good deal, however,—first with disgust, then with curiosity, at last with a feeling that there must be another side to that awful story, if one could only hear it. I will not swear that there was not also a touch of patronage in the mental attitude of George Scott regarding this charming little sinner. The virtuous woman who honestly feels it her duty to “do good to” attractive male prodigals is not without her counterpart in the opposite sex.

It seemed that Charmian Ducane was out walking again. In the island town of Samarai there is just one walk—round the coral path: twenty minutes slow, fifteen minutes fast—and you are sure to meet everyone else out walking too, if you only go often enough. Mrs. Ducane seemed to have as many rounds of the island as she wanted when she reached the magazine. She was looking tired, and she glanced at the seat desirously. Scott was on his feet at once.

“Please don’t let me turn you out,” she said, looking at him with the half-mechanical smile of the very pretty woman. As a matter of fact, she hardly saw him. She knew so exactly what he would do and how he would look—the long warm stare, the gleam of teeth under an upward curved moustache, the little bend of homage, the old, familiar phrase—men had so few—“Delighted!” “It’s a pleasure!”

"Only too glad!" . . . But the man said nothing at all. He merely lifted his hat for an instant, and then took his seat again. And Charmian Ducane dropped down rather wearily at the other end of the bench. She supposed it would only be a minute or two until her companion began edging up to her end and looking under her hat, and when that began she would get up and go, as she always did. For the moment she might rest.

But the man sat quite still and looked out to sea. Charmian began to wonder.

If she had only known, the man was wondering too: and the subject of his wondering was—"How could anyone say she did?" He had had one good look at her this time. The—pretty picture-poster face was overlaid with a certain surface coquetry, but underneath there was——

Purity. Yes. He would have staked his life on it.

Charmian also had had one good look since she sat down. She had been curious about the new-comer, and wondered what his business in Papua might be. She liked the look of his fine height and strong make: his Northern fairness and his steady grey eyes.

"I suppose he is just like all other men when you get to know him," she said to herself, "but he looks . . . kind. O God! men aren't kind, whatever they look. You always think they are, and then . . . you find out.

"He will tell me it is a cool day, by and by," she thought. "And then he will ask me if I admire the scenery. And then he will say all the usual things. They are never different, really."

But the man still said nothing.

The blood-warm water beat upon the rocks, tossing up foam. The dry, sword-shaped leaves of the stilt-legged pandanus behind the magazine rustled thirstily. Some minutes passed. Then Scott stirred as if about to go.

And Mrs. Ducane said hurriedly—

"It is almost a cool day, isn't it?"

"Yes, comparatively cool," answered Scott, turning his head politely and pushing back his Panama to feel the breeze.

"He has a forehead like a child," thought the woman. . . . "Don't you admire the scenery here very much?"

Then happened a thing that Scott has never been able to account for. Instead of replying that he did admire the scenery very much, and thought the views from the coral walk unequalled, he spoke straight out what was in his mind—what he had been turning over and over, ever since the girl from the bar sat down on the rustic seat.

"You are Mrs. Ducane," he said. "I can't believe it was true. I can't, somehow."

The honey-brown eyes grew suddenly darker with the dilation of their pupils. It was plain that Charmian was moved. It was also plain that she

might have shed tears if she had not been tired of crying. The swollen skin under the eyes proved that, and the tiny droop at the corners of the mouth. How much pain must a woman—a girl—endure before she grows weary of tears?

"A great many people have said that," answered the soft, tired voice. "I don't think they meant it."

"Well, I should think you must know I do," said Scott. Where was the virtuous thought of "improving" wicked Charmian? . . . Where were the sun-dried spots of spume that had fallen on the burning rocks half an hour before?

"I don't know. If I told you—but——" She hesitated.

Scott was unlike his new friend Dence in that he hated to be confided in. He saw it was coming now, and he set his teeth, mentally.

"But—I don't know you, and I suppose you would not be interested," said Charmian, with a sudden change of mind.

Scott was amazed at the pang of disappointment that shot across his mind. He felt absurdly like the lady of the comic papers who has braced herself reluctantly to meet the shock of a proposal, only to find that it does not come after all.

"I would be interested," he said promptly. "I would be very much interested."

After all,—blue air and sea, gold sun and waving palms, the turn of a romantic country, and a beautiful penitent ready to pour out her heart into your

more or less sympathetic ear,—it was a moving situation. Scott did not think at all that this Charmian was a white-winged angel: but he was ready to believe that her feathers were a good deal less black than they had been painted.

“ Well,” said the girl, speaking in a tired, monotonous tone, like one who has said the same thing over and over till it has almost lost meaning—“ the things they said weren’t true. I never gave any just cause for a divorce. I never tried to, or wanted to, poison anyone. I did say I wished my husband were dead, and I did say I would kill him some day. Millions of women say and think the same thing, but they don’t really mean it. I did like that doctor, until I found out what he was. It was because I sent him away that he would not tell the truth. He gave me the medicine for myself: it was a nerve tonic, and it was poisonous if you took it in anything but very small doses. I thought perhaps if things got worse, and if I’d the courage, I would kill myself, so I put it in my jewel-case to be safe. And I went so far as to pour some of it in a glass, and my husband found it. And the man lied about that and everything else. So it looked badly. And my husband believed—— Well, anyone would have: everyone does. But it wasn’t true. That man compromised me on purpose, thinking if Mr. Ducane—he was my cousin, so I have the same name still—if Mr. Ducane divorced me on his account, I should have to marry him. Mr. Ducane never would have sued

for a divorce, only for the idea that I had tried to poison him: he just went mad about that, and wouldn't listen to anything anyone said. You see, he made a kind of slave of me. I married him when I was seventeen, and he never let me have a thought of my own. He loved me, I suppose: I could have got on somehow or other if he hadn't, but that was what made it hateful, because he knew I never cared for him, and he just kept me chained. I was afraid of him, and I hated him—I . . . hated . . . him."

Her little knuckles tightened till the bones showed white.

"It makes you feel so wicked. You can't think. If I'd done everything they said, I don't think I'd feel as wicked as I do whenever I think of him. It makes one feel one isn't anything human, but just a sort of devil, to hate anyone like that. I—I'm not a strong sort of character. I'm rather weak; and he had hold of my soul with his great coarse hands—somehow. I couldn't even find strength, ever since I was seventeen, and I'm twenty-four now—I couldn't even run away from him all by myself. When he left me, and wrote that he was going to divorce me, and have me tried for my life if he could, I—I—I was glad, when I could get breath enough to think. I thought of never seeing him again, and it seemed like heaven. I just didn't think beyond the divorce. . . . But then, you see, I had to think, because there was no money, and when the decree was given, the other men—the other men . . ."

She was almost crying again: but it seemed as if the tears would not come: as if they had been all cried away. There was a thickness in her voice as she went on—

“They all believed . . . everything. They came like crows round a corpse. . . . I went to a pawnshop in the dark and sold everything I had. I saw an advertisement in the *Herald* for a resident governess for Samarai, to teach the families of several people—music, and so on. I answered it, and hid away till I heard. They said I could come. . . . I called myself ‘Mary Ducane’—Mary is my second name. But when I came up here they had seen the pictures in the papers, and they knew, and they said . . . Oh, it doesn’t matter. But I was so glad when the Figgs took me as barmaid. They’re kind, and the work isn’t nearly as bad as I thought it would be. Nobody is rude. You wouldn’t think how good those miners are. I was most afraid of them of all—but one day a commercial traveller from the boat hung over the bar and tried to kiss me, and one of the miners took him and flung him right out into the gutter, and said he and the others would do the same for anyone who dared to treat that lady disrespectfully. . . . And you know, they must all think . . . everyone does. You do too: you need not trouble to tell me you don’t.”

She ceased speaking. . . . How fierce was the blue flame of the sea! how dazzling and shadeless the green fire of the low-growing bush upon the

white-sanded islands! Out in the straits a black three-cornered fin, shaped like the sail of Death's own boat, cruised up and down, questing for prey. A cruel, formidable land, this Papua, for all its beauty: a land for strong men to seize and break and tame, it might be, but for little, weak, unhappy women? . . .

Scott was strangely moved. The tired, sweet voice: the uncomplaining tone: the certainty of being misunderstood and disbelieved, now and always, that ran like a sad accompaniment to a plaintive song all through Charmian's simply told story—these things seemed to him, somehow, intolerable. Why should she suffer so? Could not anyone help? Could not he?

He turned round to face her, on the bench, pushing back his hat again, as was his way when excited. Charmian thought once more, "How noble, how good he looks! If any man in the world were really what some of them seem!" He spoke with deliberate, deep emphasis.

"I believe every word you say, Mrs. Ducane. If it helps you at all to know that, I'm very glad indeed. If I could do anything for you . . ."

The woman laughed a bitter little laugh.

"What can a man do for a woman?" she said. "When a man says that, he doesn't mean anything. Or rather, he does mean 'anything,' and anything's nothing."

"Well, if you can tell me what I could do. . . ."

I'm sorry. Believe me, I—I am—I—what can one say? Words are such useless—— Mrs. Ducane, can you ask me to do anything? Ask me what you like."

"There's nothing," said the girl. "I've got to work out my future by myself. If I didn't get so tired. . . . But that's not being brave, and I just have got to be brave: that's all that's left me. I do think you have helped me a little, if you like to know—just by talking to me as a human being. If you knew how sick a pretty woman gets of being taken always from the one point of view—of acting the part of Circe and turning people into brutes—though she may hate it all the time—well, you'd understand why this talk has been like a—like a drink of fresh water when one has had nothing but syrups and brandies. There, that reminds me of my work: I've stayed out far too long. No, don't come with me—I like to be alone. Good-bye—and—thank you."

When Scott went back to the hotel he found Rupert Dence extended on a long chair on the verandah, smoking.

"Will you come and go over those figures again with me when you've finished your smoke?" he said. He was feeling jovial and good-humoured and inclined for work. Doubtless this was due to the south-east wind which had sprung up strongly in the course of the afternoon, cooling and clearing the hothouse atmosphere of the island.

Dence got up from the lounge and walked off towards his own room. There was a sulky look in his usually amiable blue eyes.

"Don't feel like it," he said.

"Fever?" queried Scott.

"Perfectly fit, thanks. Just been for a walk round the island." He went into his room and slammed the door.

CHAPTER V

CHARMIAN DUCANE, gentlewoman by birth, and barmaid at the Federal, had always been a lonely little soul.

Men's admiration, it was true, she had had in overflowing plenty, ever since, at barely fourteen years of age, her singular prettiness began to develop under the influence of the burning Queensland suns. She was an orphan, brought up by a somewhat cold and unsympathetic English grandmother, who smelled evidence of bush-ranging ancestry in every departure from the standards of South Kensington. And Charmian had none of the blood of South Kensington in her veins. She was her mother's daughter all in all—the child of beautiful Mary Eves, whose father . . . Well, in the old Queensland days nobody thought cattle-lifting the worst of crimes: and a too hasty use of rifle or revolver was easily forgiven.

Charmian "took after" the Eves' side of the family. Grant Ducane, her second cousin, resembled the English side. Charmian used to think it was small wonder the Ducanes had emigrated to Australia: surely any country that was cursed with the whole family would do its best to get rid of as many

as possible. . . . And at seventeen years of age she married Grant.

She was not in love with him. But old Mrs. Ducane was dying: there was no money in the family except what Grant possessed, and everybody said little Charmian would come to a bad end if she were not looked after. She had had admirer after admirer, all penniless and few "serious": she had been half engaged to one at fifteen, entangled with two a year later, and jilted another before her next birthday. She did not care particularly about any of the crowd—who cares for what is won so cheaply?—and when Grant told her she was going to marry him, she accepted the fact with resignation, not unmixed with pleasure. There would be a wedding, and a white satin dress with a long train, and a cake, and a bridal journey—all sorts of pleasant things, with only Grant to take the edge off them. And Grant had always been a kill-joy in her life: he wouldn't be any worse now. He was so old—thirty-five or more—she hardly felt as if he could have much to do with her. They would go their different ways, like lots of married people. And it was something to have a house of one's own—besides the wedding fun.

She did not get the wedding fun. Grant did not want to be laughed at for marrying a girl nearly twenty years younger than himself: he insisted that the grandmother and Charmian should travel to Brisbane and have a private ceremony early in the

morning. There was not even a cake. There was no white satin dress—the little bride cried her eyes red over this the night before the wedding, and Grant scolded her next day for having made a figure of herself. There was no house of her own. Grant's business took him to a dull inland town and they lived there in an hotel. They went straight to the hotel from Brisbane, and there was no wedding-tour. Charmian wondered indignantly what was the good of getting married at all.

She discovered before long that it was possible to hate Grant much more than she had ever done before. She discovered that other men were sorry for her, and that they seemed very kind. There were storms that gave the other people endless food for talk. And the women began to look coldly on Charmian.

She discovered more things as the months and years went by. She discovered that the other men were not really kind at all, only wicked. She cried and cried when she found this out. What was she to do when the women hated her and the men were wicked? Was she never to have anyone to talk to? She grew ill with worry of mind, and a doctor was called in. He seemed different from all the rest, and Charmian, only three-and-twenty as yet, confided all her troubles to him. She told him how she hated Grant, and what a lonely life she had. She told him that the other men were wicked. The doctor was sympathetic and patient: he was rather re-

ligious too, and that pleased Charmian: when a man quoted texts to you—the Song of Solomon and other Bible things—he could not be bad. Charmian, at this period of her married life, used to pray for the doctor every night, and quite seriously thank Heaven for having sent him to her. She did not like wicked people, and there were so many in the world, and they all wanted you to be like themselves. The doctor told her he loved her for her purity of soul.

It was after this that the explosion came—the volcanic eruption that laid waste the dull and homely garden of Charmian's life, and cast her out to wander in the wilderness. She never knew how they missed that train, lost their way, got left in the little country inn. The doctor knew, but he never told. He told her a great many other things—things she had never thought to hear from him—but not that. Charmian, burning with indignation and sobbing with bitter disappointment, went home next day to tell her husband, and bear his sarcasm, his reproofs, even perhaps his violence. "It will only be another row," she said to herself . . . there had been so many, though he was always saying he loved her.

Grant Ducane was gone. Their rooms were given up. There was a letter for her, written that morning and left with the manageress. The woman stood by and watched her read it, with a greedy eye. Charmian was always sorry that she had so nearly fainted—it must have pleased the harpy who watched her.

The letter told her that he had found her out, that he would have her disgraced and imprisoned, and that she had no home with him any more.

She lived on the remains of her last quarter's allowance till the case came on. She was not arrested on the poisoning charge, for Grant Ducane had found there was not evidence enough. Nevertheless, he believed firmly that his downtrodden little wife had intended to free herself by a crime, and during the hearing of the divorce case his counsel brought in so many references to the unlucky bottle in the jewel-case, to Charmian's one frantic threat, to a certain dose of the poison, mixed and poured into a glass Ducane occasionally used, that for some time the question of arrest really did hang in the balance. On the public mind the final effect was much the same as if Charmian had been tried and barely acquitted. Most people believed she intended to compass the death of Grant.

The divorce was given without question. The doctor denied everything smilingly, and as if from mere conventional motives. Charmian's innocent walks and talks, the incidents of her illness, the stay at the hotel, all appeared black as night, under the clever handling of Ducane's counsel. The doctor employed no counsel at all. He knew himself to be ruined professionally, but he had come into money not long before, and could snap his fingers at that. He expected to marry Mrs. Ducane in six months' time: true, she had expressed the

strongest disgust and hatred for him; but, after all, she had been very fond of him to begin with, and what could she do for a living?

What Charmian did has been told. She was mortally afraid of the doctor, as she was afraid of the man from whom she had been freed. She did not think it impossible that her lover might succeed in worrying and driving her into a marriage—the little creature felt herself, instinctively, destined to be a quarry in the struggle of life. But hunted beasts are swift, if they are not brave. She fled. New Guinea seemed to her a sanctuary, by reason of its remoteness, and once landed under the leaning palms of Samarai she felt safe.

The insult that had driven her into the bar of Figg's hotel really did not trouble her much. Women had always been hateful to her: had always talked and hinted and cast sly stones. They were a little more open now: that was all. She was very lonely at times. But then, she had been lonely all her life.

She liked Rupert Dence. He had been sentimental about her from the first, just like all the other men, and when she told him something of her story, he had promptly said he believed her. She felt, indeed, that, whether he did believe or not, he didn't care—that if the tales had been true he would have shot those long glances from his sleepy blue eyes at her, and pressed her fingers when she handed him his glass, just the same. That, she supposed, was as

much credit as she could ever expect from anyone again. And poor Rupert, if he had not been such a drinker, was a lovable soul. As to the drinking—well, you cannot act as barmaid in an Australasian hotel for several months without losing a good deal of the ordinary feeling on such matters. Charmian was rather in danger of classing her men friends, in these days, by the various ways in which they got drunk. Some were so much less objectionable than others.

Then came George Scott.

He did not drink at all, after the first evening. He went to church on Sundays, whenever the missionary held service. He had nothing to do with the native girls. He did not swear (Charmian had never heard him in an engine-room wrestling with a refractory piece of machinery). He was a gentleman every inch, in spite of his hardened hands: and he treated her like a gentlewoman. And he was brave. One of the pearling men from the Trobriand Islands, where the saints do not come from, called him a "wowser," on a certain Sunday morning, as the Ulsterman was starting out to church. Scott did not understand the term at first, but being told by a Melbourne traveller that it meant, in the "Australian language," the most offensive kind of canting sneak and hypocrite, he said that it was a work of piety and necessity to teach the pearler better, and that he would stay home and do it. On which the whole population of Figg's adjourned

to the top of the island, where they spent the hours of divine service enjoying the spectacle of the best fight that Samarai had seen since the good old, bad old Crown Colony days. The pearler was the worse damaged of the two, and public opinion voted him "served right." Scott went to evening church, black eyes, swollen nose, and all. He said he would teach any confounded beach-comber in the Pacific to dictate to a decent Belfast man: but it seemed that no beach-comber, confounded or otherwise, desired any further lessons on the subject.

Charmian was delighted: she had not very much religion herself of any kind, but she could not help respecting a man who was ready to defend his beliefs so vigorously. It was about this time that she began watching for Scott's boots on the staircase. From the back of the bar you could see the boots of people going up and down the stairs, though you could not see their bodies or faces until they crossed the hall and came out into the street—and if you were busy serving at the crucial moment you did not see them at all, which was bitterly disappointing. She got to know every pair of boots and shoes the young Ulsterman possessed, as well as she knew her own face in the glass. By and by she used to feel a jump of the heart that nearly made her drop the tumblers when that pair of brown boots with the heavy strapping, or the black leather shoes with the wide laces, or the canvas deck-shoes, trodden long and narrow by the light Irish foot, came quickly down the stair-

case. She didn't want Scott to drink like some of the others, but she did wish he would come in now and then for a glass of beer—where was the harm of that? A man needn't be so very, very good.

She began to be conscious now of a gnawing little hunger that beset her every morning when she had not seen Scott since the previous night. It was a desire to look at him again. She used to come out into the front of the bar and stand in the breeze, because it was so hot. . . . From this point of view you could see people going upstairs—all of them. A good view of the clean white "patrol" suit, with the fair bright head topping it, seemed to give her enough to go on with for the morning. But after that the hunger would begin again, and the sight of a pair of long narrow shoes taking the stairs three at a time was no better than a crumb of bread to a starving man. She did not know how to live till four o'clock,—when one was off duty one could go round the island, and sometimes one passed the white patrol suit on the coral track so near that one could see the very threads in the stuff. Every time she met Scott, after an interval of half a day or so, she decided that his face was better-looking than she had remembered it. She was never quite sure that his eyebrows were really jet-black, in spite of his fair hair, until she had had another look. "If he were a girl," she said, "nobody would think it real." And she could never believe that his forehead was really so white and so broad and smooth, just like a little

child's, till she had seen it again. "It makes him look so innocent," she said. "But men are not—none of them are really good."

She could not understand why he did not talk to her more. After that hour on the bench beside the magazine, when he had been so kind,—or seemed so kind: she had to remind herself that it was always seeming,—she had certainly expected that he would ask her to go a walk with him, or come into the bar for a bottle of mineral waters, or linger near her corner of the verandah when she was likely to come out of her room. He did not. He looked at her in a merry, bright-eyed Irish way when they met by accident, and sometimes he stopped for a moment's talk—but Rupert Dence took three times as much trouble to please her. Dence used to go over to the islands in the Straits to find bush flowers that she liked: he was always asking her to go boating, and sometimes she went,—and he was never out of the bar. Even when he had taken too much whiskey, as he did every night, he was civil and kind to her: when he found he had almost reached his limit he would slip away as best he could, to avoid offending her eyes. If he grew violent, it was always after she had gone to bed and Figg had taken her place in the bar. Rupert, according to his lights, thought much of her, and considered her.

Did Scott?

Well, yes, she thought he did. She had no reasons at all for thinking so, which made her all the more

certain. But if he did, why did he stay—just where he was? Other men were ready enough, and quick enough, if they got so much as a crumb of encouragement: sometimes when they got none. And Scott . . .

She did not understand him.

In the long days that had to be worn through somehow, waiting for Anderson's return, Scott avoided much intimate conversation with himself. He had the habit of hard work, and made it serve him. There was a steam launch that had been sunk and salvaged: her engineer found the job of repairing the machinery almost too much for him, and Scott, with his solid Belfast training at his back, and his kindly will to help anyone who needed helping, came in at the right moment, like an angel into, rather than out of, a machine. The engineer's troubles melted in a morning, and his heart was filled with gratitude for this aristocrat of his profession who was so ready to waive his superior position, and come down to labour all day among strained and rusted machinery with a little Tyneside rat who had never a certificate to his name, nor a shade of gentle manners in his whole composition.

Working hard all day in a tropical climate, and going to bed early, left not much time or inclination for musing. Scott did not muse. Sometimes, however, irrelevant scraps of poetry would float into his brain and stick there an entire day, keeping time

to the sound of his tools on the rusted steel, or to the low "sss-frssh" of the waves on the spit of sand where they worked. . . . There was a poem of Adam Lindsay Gordon's: he could only recall stray fragments, but they haunted him all one burning day, when the trades had blown themselves out, and the sea was white-hot glass, and Normanby Island's three thousand feet of sapphire cliff stood pale and clear on the horizon of the Straits, forty miles away.

" . . . You in your beauty above me bent,
Spoke to me, touched me without intent,
Made me your servant for once and all.

From a long way off, to look at your charms
Made my blood run redder in every vein. . . .

. . . The gusts in the gloomy gorges whirl
Brown leaves and red till they cover your bed—
Now I trust that your sleep is a sound one, girl!"

Would she live long—that beautiful, ill-fated soul?

"Now I trust that your sleep is a sound one, girl!"

The sea was saying it: the hot waves that crisped upon the blinding shore. Would she be sorry when the long sleep came? Would it come soon?

"Desdemona should have been her name," something inside the man was saying. "Desdemona—ill-fated."

"If you wouldn't mind 'olding that axle a bit stiddier". . . came the apologetic voice of the

little man from Tyneside. And Scott begged his pardon. "Give it to me," he said. "You'd better do the holding, and I'll fix it."

"Do you take quinin' now and again? You should," said the other. "You look as if a dose wouldn't do you any 'arm. That fever's always on the pounce after a new chum."

Next day it rained: a roaring, stamping, drowning rain, that made the Ulsterman understand once for all how the two-fathom annual rainfall of Samarai came about. It was impossible to go on with the launch. One could only tramp restlessly up and down the verandahs, looking out through a grey curtain upon drowned white coral streets, downbeaten pawpaws, flooded cricket-ground. The noise was so great that one had to shout when speaking. It was not really rain that fell, it was water in great sheets: one felt as though one stood in the perilous passage behind Niagara, seeing the ceaseless fall swing down before one's face. Every moment one felt that it was pouring so hard that it must stop: and every minute it seemed to take breath and pour harder.

It got on Scott's nerves—it, the relentless rain of Samarai, gets on the nerves of most people. Most of the day he tramped ceaselessly, feeling the verandah boards sag beneath his feet, but hearing no more noise from his steps than if he had been deaf. Something beat in his brain to-day, as yesterday, but it seemed to have reference to nothing in particular. All the more it tormented him, and would not leave

him, chanting throughout the day to the magnificent orchestra of the rain . . . just a scrap of Shakespeare out of his old school "Reciter," marked with the mechanical emphasis of the book: first one word in prominence, and then another—

"But Brutus is an HONOURABLE man . . ."

"For BRUTUS is an honourable man . . ."

Late in the day, when the dark afternoon was glooming down to night, a call of "Sail-O!" sounded from the beach. A small white schooner, driving dim and ghostlike through the rain, came up from China Straits and fluttered to the jetty.

Rupert Dence came out of his room and looked from under the pouring eaves.

"That's Blackwood's schooner," he said. "Anderson's back."

CHAPTER VI

“ . . . EASY? I'm glad you think so: just you keep on thinkin' that way as long as you can.”

Scott was beginning to understand what Dence had meant when he said that. They were well started on the gold-hunt now—Dence, Anderson, himself, and four-and-thirty native carriers—and the way of the traveller in Papua was unfolding itself.

First, there had been a trip of several hundred miles along the coast, in a cranky toy steamer meant to carry nine passengers in her cabins and twenty or so on her decks. She carried nineteen and eighty-one. The nor'-west season was setting in, and the weather was uniformly bad. There were storms every day, and they could seldom anchor at night, which was annoying, because much of the Papuan coast is hardly charted at all, and if you run in the dark you take chances. The *Cora Lynn* took them, also much of the Pacific Ocean in sections. They got to the Kikiramu in time, nevertheless: and the captain said he had really thought she was gone this time; another trip like that would finish her, because there wasn't a spot in her plates you couldn't rip up with a tin-opener. Nobody minded what he said: they had heard it all before, and the *Cora Lynn* still laboured up and down the coasts.

Arrived at the Kikiramu, it seemed that the launch which travelled irregularly up and down the river was out of reach at the upper end, and not likely to appear until her engineer wanted coconuts or fish. Scott's party, and the various other miners going up to the Kikiramu field with their boys, were dumped out on a black sand beach in the midst of the mangrove swamps and left to wait. They waited two weeks, living in tents, using up their provisions, and swearing. When the *Dragon-Fly* launch turned up, she took forty or fifty carriers, and ten white (she was built to carry two in her cabin and eight or nine on deck), while the remainder waited another week. It rained atrociously: it was as hot as the inside of a Turkish bath: the sand-flies bit, and mosquitoes stung, and if you went along the beach in the dusk, to get cool, you ran the risk of being taken by an alligator. Scott found this out the first night that he tried a solitary stroll: something that sounded like a torpedo leaving its tube charged at him in the dark out of the water, and if he had not spent five years in the shipyards of Belfast, where clumsiness of movement means wounds and death, there would have been a full-fed crocodile that night on the banks of the Kikiramu, and an empty tin plate at the miners' supper. But he jumped quick enough—just—and ran as he never had thought he could run, reaching the lighted tents much out of breath. Nobody thought his adventure remarkable, though some laughed at it. Nor was

anyone excited when a miner came in exhibiting an ugly barbed throwing-spear which he had found sticking in the wall of his tent a few minutes earlier. Anderson said they were cross-grained little beggars about here, and related, as an excellent joke, an adventure he had met with on Ferguson Island, while recruiting. Taking French leave, he had entered the house of an absent trader, and while enjoying a capital night's rest in the trader's good new bed, fitted with a real chain mattress, he was awaked by several violent blows from underneath, followed by enraged and embittered howls. He snatched a lantern from the table where it was burning, and made a dash out underneath the house. There he found a Ferguson Islander yelling over the loss of his treasured spear, which was hopelessly entangled, owing to its barbs, in the meshes of the chain mattress. The native fled at his approach, crying with rage and disappointment, and accusing the absent trader of witchcraft—also, incidentally, of unsportsmanlike conduct, and not playing the game.

The story was received with roars of laughter. Dence remarked that some of the D'Entrecasteaux traders put sheet iron on the wicker floors under their beds, and further observed that he had known a whole Papuan family (down in Mekeo, where they sleep in a huge native-cloth bag, to keep off the mosquitoes) speared like snakes in a sack by a war-party, who never so much as entered the house. More laughter greeted this tale. Scott turned into

his bed—a sack stretched over a frame of poles—wondering at the local taste in jokes, and feeling thankful that the solid sand of the beach was his own flooring that night.

Then for four days they chunked and rattled up the river, a great cocoa-coloured flood full of snags and reefs, in the tired little launch. All day they lay under the awning of the engine-room roof, where they could just find space to crawl about: enduring as best they could the three-times-heated furnace of the sun, the engine, and the stove, where meals were cooked. Food was served among the sprawling boots of the company, and eaten from their knees. At night they landed, holding on by teeth and eyelids, on a perpendicular bank topped by trees set as close as hairs in a brush. The boys started clearing immediately, and swung their axes to fine effect: in half an hour the dense undergrowth was gone, and space left among the great trees for tents and fires. They had supper in the open, where they could stretch their cramped limbs, and they slept under the hastily slung flies of their tents, the fresh-smelling earth of the forest floor beneath them, and the untrodden, unknown vistas of the primeval wilderness looking at them through the open flaps of the canvas. It was always possible that the Karivas, a ghostly night-wandering tribe, never yet seen by the white men of Papua, might attack the camp in their silent way and carry off a dead body or two out of the tents without the others being a whit the wiser. It

was not impossible that a hungry alligator might creep up out of the river and take his luck where he found it. And it was clear—judging by the death-adder that dropped from the fly of the tent right into Anderson's supper-plate one night, and the lively tiger-snake captured under Scott's mosquito net—that other drawbacks to the simple life might be discovered along the Kikiramu River. But the miners "took the chances." . . . Scott began to know the phrase.

During the journey he thought it well to learn as much, and say as little, as he could. The miners seemed to like him, though they called him a "new chum" and a "kid"—they were all much older than himself, some of them beginning to display grey beards on their unshaven chins as the days went on. They talked a good deal of the field, and the best ways of prospecting, and the possibility of the reef being found some day—up on the spurs of Albert Edward or Victoria, perhaps, or it might be somewhere on Scratchley. Scott learned that "alluvial" mining is mere scraping and washing out of gold that has escaped from the mother-source: he heard that all the gold found on the mainland of Papua had been of this kind, and that none of it began to compare with the richness of some of the Australian fields in the early days. You didn't get nuggets in Papua, he heard: you might, if you were very lucky indeed, and if you were not a new chum, find a patch

where there was as much as eight or ten ounces a day to be got for a little while (What was an ounce worth? Three pounds, fifteen shillings), and, say, two or three ounces for some months. But in general, if you got a couple of ounces a day, you did very well. And you had to work for that, and you had to feed and pay your boys out of it. What did you want boys for? Well, you were to wait till you got to the field and you'd see.

None of the other miners knew the real object of Scott's party: it was supposed that they were merely out on an ordinary prospecting trip. They had succeeded in finding two of the late Mr. Cripps' boys, by the simple process of going down to the village where he had recruited his carriers and asking where each available recruit had last been working. But they had asked no questions so far.

"What a native don't know, he can't tell: we don't want to get them talking when we're passing through the field," said Anderson.

They had gone over the paper again at Samarai, and Anderson had given it as his opinion that Cripps' reef might be found, though it would take a good deal of finding. The dead man and his mate had started from the Kikiramu field into the unknown, on their last journey, accompanied only by their boys. None of the miners knew exactly where Cripps had gone, or what he had been doing when he met with his end. They only knew that his mate had come back to Samarai alone, abandoning

the trip because it was unsuccessful, and that, later on, the natives had brought down news of Cripps' death. That was all.

Anderson had taken command of the little party from the first, and Scott, not without a grimace or two, had let him do it. He was not fond of being "bossed"; but the tall, tough, quiet miner had the knack of inspiring confidence, even in those who did not like him. Lying on the hot roof of the engine-room, and watching the mysterious black walls of the forest slide endlessly by, Scott thought once more of his favourite poet, and decided that certain lines of Gordon's—describing a horse, it was true—fitted Anderson to a hair.

"The lean brown head of the Blacklock breed
And the resolute eye that loves the lead."

Dence was a much more likable character, even allowing for his destroying weakness—but Anderson was the man to take them through what they were going to face, or die in the attempt. And here, on the Kikiramu River, the second clause seemed to carry a meaning more than merely rhetorical.

He also thought, much and long, of Charmian Ducane. Not for a moment did he attempt to disguise from himself the thing that had happened to him. It was just what had happened to millions of other men, in fiction and in real life. He had found out, after binding himself to a woman, that she was not the one woman, and that someone else was.

That other had been shapen and made for him from the earliest dawn of life and time, and he loved her to the remotest corner of his soul. But he was not to have her.

Yes, it had certainly happened to millions: he could believe that. What he could not believe was that it had hurt any of the millions as it hurt him.

Well, pain could be borne. But there was something worse. Truth and untruth, honour and dishonour, seemed to have changed places. Was it not wrong, even wicked, that he should leave his own woman, Charmian, and marry the other, the good, noble, loving girl who yet was not created and marked out for him from the world's beginning? Almost adulterous that union looked to him—now. . . . Had not he and Charmian lived before, been married in some former existence? He had always laughed at crystal-gazers and their kin, but if one of them were to come to him now, and show him in the depths of the magic ball strange pictures of a life of long ago, when he and Charmian had been bridegroom and bride, had travelled together, lived in the same house for years and years, brought up and married their children, grown old and died together—why, he would have believed every bit of it. He almost believed it now. Could a man have such a sense of passionate right to a woman without foundation for that right existing—somewhere, somewhen? He found himself thinking of Char-

mian's divorced husband as a man of the Middle Ages might have thought of a robber-knight who had carried away and imprisoned his lady. The lady was freed: the robber had never had any right to her: she had hated him, and gone with him all unwillingly—in God's name, then, forget, and let her come back to her home!

But the gate of home was barred—something in time and space had gone wrong, and she might not enter any more. So she was out there all alone on the open road, where cruel storms might break on her unprotected head, and other robber-knights might come riding by and carry her off again. And he to whom she belonged of right could only look at her across the bars and turn away. She had called to him (he knew well that Charmian loved him), but he could not answer.

. . . Could he not? Was it really right to spoil three lives instead of one? Down went the balance with a clang on the side of expediency. . . . Was there such a thing in the world as honour? Up flew the scale and down on the other side. What would any decent man say, if one asked him? Why, of course he would say . . . but then, the decent man would not know the circumstances: he would think that this was an ordinary love-affair, whereas . . .

Scott almost burst out laughing. Was not everybody's especial love-affair unique? And had he not supposed himself, a year ago, that the feeling he

had for Janie was without parallel in the history of humanity?

Then—this new love of his—was it something that he would forget and make little of, some day?

No, by God, it was not. He had no reasons: he could not have made a statement of his case, in speech or in writing, worth twopence. He could not find words to express or prove anything at all in connection with the whole affair: it seemed to have no more to do with words than music had to do with the symbols of algebra—but this was—IT. This made him understand what Antony felt for Cleopatra. This told him why Parnell had sold Ireland. This made plain to him the excuses claimed by seeming-virtuous wives and husbands when they broke through the fences separating the Good from the Bad, and fled hand in hand with their disgraceful loves to obscurity. Why, if he, George Scott, had met Charmian before her divorce, he could have imagined himself smashing through that very fence with small remorse,—if he had been free. But now . . .

It seemed a much worse thing to desert Janie. It seemed so bad, indeed, that he could not do it.

“And I would like to know,” groaned Scott, “where my ideas of decency have got to if I can look at things in such a crooked way?”

“All the same,” he said to himself, “crooked or straight, it comes to the one thing—I can’t be a beast to Janie.”

CHAPTER VII

HE had something else to think of before long. The lazy days were ended at last—the long, slow crawl up the coast, the wait at the river-mouth, the leisurely chunking up the river, the mornings and afternoons when one lay on the deck of the *Dragon-Fly* smoking and dreaming and watching the flights of gargoy-le-headed hornbills rise screaming out of the reeds, or the rare red birds of paradise rocket from tree to tree. Already the world of trains and cities seemed almost incredibly remote, the very ports of Papua itself dim, unsubstantial as mirages seen and forgotten on a long desert journey. And yet the real work lay all before them.

One morning, about eleven o'clock, the miners began to get astir, packing their canvas "swags" and shouting directions, in pidgin-English and in scraps of many dialects, to their boys. The carriers themselves, who had spent the days of travel in one long orgy of betel-chewing and Jew's-harp and tin-whistle playing, began to collect their own effects, their beads and bits of dried fish and sticks of sago, their shell armlets and dog-tooth necklaces, and Manchester cotton singlets. It was plain that the landing-place was near.

In another half-hour the *Dragon-Fly* had stopped, and a stream of excited Papuans was spilling over her bulwarks on to the muddy river-bank, like ants running on to a plate. Sacks, bags, and cases were chucked ashore; owners jumped after them. The launch began vomiting cargo to an incredible extent, and the crowd of fresh carriers who had been waiting for her arrival, encamped in a small clearing, came forward with their sacks and poles to carry the goods to the little split-log store just visible some distance off. There was a dwelling-house beside the store,—a mere hut piled together of miscellaneous bush material,—and here, in company with the one lonely white in charge of the store, the miners spent the night, camping in their tents as before, and busying themselves all evening over the packing of their goods in carrying-swags for the journey to the gold-field, two days' march away.

By seven o'clock next morning the storekeeper had his own boys—a crowd of thirty-nine naked savages, marshalled by a wild-looking Kiwai in a crownless hat and half a pair of trousers—away on their march to the field. The miners spent the day breaking open countless cases of their own, covering the muddy ground with small mountains of tinned goods,—meat, fish, vegetables, fruit—with mats of rice and sacks of flour, with oblong tins of kerosene, sides of bacon in canvas, canisters of tea, bottles of sauce wrapped in straw, matches, tobacco, blankets, billy-cans. Scott took a hand in

the work and in the subsequent stowing away of everything into small swags for the backs of the carriers. Loads were light, no more than fifty pounds was given to any man, and some had less. It looked as though there were work ahead. Scott was not sorry: he rather fancied his walking, and, as the youngest man in the company, thought he might be able to show them a thing or two.

But next morning, when they started, it took exactly half a mile to dispose of that illusion—half a mile of the Kikiramu track, which was not, as some of the men assured him, by any means the worst in the country. Scott would not have known it was a track at all if he had not been told. When you could see it, it was mostly a river-bed, with the river in full possession, or else a ninety-foot log, worn and slippery with rain, slung across some precipitous gully at an alarming slope, and guiltless of handrail. Sometimes it was a swamp of scarlet clay, glutinous, holding, and half-knee high. Occasionally it was a bit of "corduroy" logging, laid in black slime and more than half-buried in it: as soon as you got over this, you stopped to pick the leeches out of your socks, and you did not bother to wipe the trickles of blood off your boots, as you knew there would be plenty more by and by. When you were not staggering over the corduroy or balancing with set teeth and throbbing heart across one of those atrocious log bridges, or jumping from rock to rock in the midst of a foaming rapid, you

were climbing endlessly up a sort of purgatorial staircase composed of roots and slippery clay, helping yourself with your hands, lifting your feet to the level of your waist at every step, and feeling, as the relentless tramp went on and on, that you would certainly die before the end of it, but that you would rather die—much rather—than give in.

“Good God, what are they made of?” groaned the “new chum” to himself. “This would be a fair-to-middling pace on an ordinary road, in a cool climate—whereas here . . .”

It did not look as if they were going fast—they seemed to be strolling—strolling up precipices, over bridges made of half a dozen plaited creepers, strolling from tip to tip of rocks buried in roaring foam, strolling from bristling log to log, in a chaos of felled trees—always in a temperature that set every pore gaping wide, and kept it streaming—just strolling. It was not the pace, but the unvarying rate, that was killing. Scott got left a dozen times, struggled up as often, got left again, and kept the party waiting, but shut his teeth and stuck to it. They did nine miles of this fearful country between two o'clock and six, with the help of one long downhill that came as near diving on land as anything Scott had ever seen, and stopped at last in what was evidently a favourite camping-place—a brown clearing in the forest, walled in by cliffs of vegetation so knitted together with orchids, creepers, and the long Jacob's ladders of the lianas, that

it seemed as if not even a snake could have wound its way through.

The miners' small army of carriers were almost all up as soon as the masters: some of them had beaten the unloaded whites by half an hour. Tents were got up and fires lighted with as much speed as possible, for the afternoon rains, which had held off amazingly so far, seemed now about to burst. They did burst before supper was fairly over, and the men finished their meal sitting almost in one another's laps, inside the narrow shelter of the canvas flies. All night the thunderous torrent roared down, drowning every other sound; the swollen Kikiramu seemed to run silently over its rocky bed below; the carriers laughed and chattered round their sheltered fire apparently in dumbshow. When the camp had gone to rest, Scott slept but ill on his sack-and-sapling couch. Something was oppressing him, he could scarce tell what . . . not the thought of Charmian—that was just a dull pain that he had learned to bear—it was something new. So new in his experience that it seemed nameless.

He fell asleep at last with the weight still on his mind; woke in the dead hour of the night, with the last sparks of the camp-fires out, and the rain thundering ceaselessly, and knew what it was. It was the terror of the wilderness!

"What a country! what a country!" he said to himself, over and over, feeling all the time that it was not the country, but something behind it: a

giant, sinister, unfriendly power—a thing that the little handful of whites in the country fought against, as cavemen might have fought against “dragons of the prime” with their little useless sticks and slings. . . . Those awful ridges buried in knitted forest, over which they had been creeping—the plunging scarps and precipices—the torrential rivers, the blue, far, unscalable mountain horns that looked at him mockingly through rents in the choking forest wall—what were they, ant-like little human creatures, that they should dare to challenge such powers? Here, in the interior of the last unconquered territory of the world, life floated as precariously on the tossing surface of a thousand warring forces as a shipwrecked swimmer floats on a furious sea. Men were nothing, Nature—not Mother Nature any longer, as in the lands of golden fields and smiling hills, but “Nature red in tooth and claw,” was everything. . . . And it was out of this appalling welter of unbroken primeval world that he, and Dence, and Anderson, meant to rip the secret of Cripps’ gold—they three against the universe.

“Oh, Lord, I must go to sleep!” groaned Scott, worrying his head down into the bundle of clothes that served him for pillow. “I’ll never keep up to-morrow.”

The rain thundered; the forest smelt fresh and wet, through the opening of the fly. There was an odour of something tropical and scented; there was

an oozy whiff from the river, there was the acrid breath of dying fires, and rising through all there was the smell of the night itself that wanderers and campers know. Scott, the man house-reared and city-bred, lying there beneath the little shelter of the fly, with the men of the wilderness sleeping by his side, began to feel that this day and this night, and the days and the nights that had gone by before, had been an initiation. Something in him had changed since the *Cora Lynn* lurched out of Samarai. Something that had been lost . . . how long ago? Gods of the doors that close behind our birth, how long? . . . was found.

The task ahead looked no less gigantic; but the miners' phrase gathered meaning in the face of it.

"Yes—'one takes the chances,'" thought Scott. And now the camp was all asleep.

The next day was a little better than the first. Scott found himself keeping back the party not so much, and suffering somewhat less than the utmost extremity of physical agony himself. This was an improvement; but the log bridges almost annihilated it, for they were much worse on this section, and the newcomer found himself obliged to get down and cross them at an ignominious crawl, shutting his eyes to the rocks and rapids far below—while the miners went before and after him as lightly as tight-rope dancers, smoking and talking as they crossed.

It dawned upon him to-day, in the midst of the

eternal scrambling and sliding, wading and climbing, that they were, and had been, passing through magnificent scenery. The mad monsters at play, who had apparently seized all those mountain ranges and precipices and rivers, and beaten them up together like smashed eggs in a bowl, had effected some combinations very wonderful and beautiful to see in the process. There were bird-songs to be noted, too, when labouring lungs and straining muscles allowed one to pay attention. The loveliest birds, such as the fiery Raggiana, the snow-white, golden-crested cockatoos, the rare black velvet rifle-bird, only squawked and scolded; but there were little tinkling notes of infinite sweetness from unseen recesses of the bush, and cheery fluting of the impudent pied butcher-bird, and, best of all, the deep, bell-like toll of the giant Gaura pigeon, Clara Butt among birds, calling with a velvet voice from somewhere dim and shadowy and far away. . . .

. . . But, after all, one had to keep up—and if one listened or looked too much, one fell behind, which was unbearable. Scott was well aware by this time that these toughened pioneers could give him a mile in every three, and more, that they were kindly men who would grant him just as much law as he asked for—when he asked it. Just for that reason he asked none. He could not swallow a bit of tinned meat or a fragment of biscuit at the midday halt for lunch; he burned with thirst, but kept his pannikin slung to his belt, scarce wet all day, know-

ing that too much water is the end of all things on a heavy march. And he kept up.

Near sundown someone said they were close upon the field, and Scott said the heartiest prayer of thanksgiving that had left his lips for many a day. Just as he was calculating that they must be within half an hour's walk, came the last insult of Nature and New Guinea—a ridge like a wall, four hundred feet high, with a rough log and liana ladder set upon its face among the tangled trees that hung down and out over the empty air. The heart of the "new chum" died within him, but he set his face to the wall and climbed himself blind. He could scarcely see where he was, or stand upon his feet when he reached the top. Dence had gone on; the rest were invisible, far ahead. Only Anderson stood at the top of the ridge, with one foot on the upward and one on the downward slope—for it was no wider than the roof of a house—holding a whiskey-bottle, cork out.

"Take two or three swallows; it'll get you down to the camp," he said. His manner was cold, but there was approval in the hard green eyes; and Scott, his ragged-out nervous system responding instantly to the fiery drink, felt warmed in body and mind. Absurdly glad, too, that he had pleased Anderson.

They waited for a moment on the narrow spine of the ridge, Anderson standing as still as a tree-trunk and looking at something a long way off. The

miners always seemed to be looking at something a long way off. Scott, while he got back his strength, and let the whiskey do its work, sat on a fallen log, staring up and down, and wondering where the field was; for he had heard you could see it from the top of the ridge, and he was eager for the sight of that wonderful and fateful thing, a goldfield.

Under the toes of his boots there were treetops garlanded in wreathing cloud: below, more and more treetops, veiling a tremendous gorge deep-furred with forest that had shot up close and spindly to reach the far-off light. At the bottom one could hear an invisible river wrangling over rocks and falls. Opposite, the wave of forest that swept down to the river from the crest of the ridge gathered itself again for a splendid rush up again into the zenith of the sky. Beyond were green and blue fragments of the crests of other incredible earth waves—one could almost feel the colossal downward rush and upward sweep of every billow. It seemed as though the ridge on which one stood must by and by swing loose and hurl its tossing forest crest at the very sun in heaven.

An appalling landscape, if a lovely one. But . . . where was the field?

Scott began to understand. A few thin streams of smoke rose up through the trees, here and there, indicating camps and fires. In one spot there was just so much bush cleared away as would allow one to build two or three little brown huts; and there

was a thin scratch of track leading down to the clearing. This, no doubt, was the store and the warden's office. For the miners it was clear that they lived, like fish, groping about at the bottom of the deep green sea of forest, a hundred feet removed from the light of day.

"What a country!" he thought.

"Ready?" asked Anderson, turning his iron-bark face and shaggy beard towards Scott.

Scott was not ready, for his limbs felt like lead, and his internal organs were fighting each other for place and space that seemed to have suddenly failed. But he was up at once, and footing it down the gorge, as gaily as he might. There was a sort of staircase of rough logs here, and a handrail to hold by—it was possible for a very, very tired man to walk as if he were not tired at all. And here was the store, after only a few minutes—a long, low hut built of split slabs from the bush, with a wide verandah and a rough bench set on the ground beneath, and a score or more of miners, raising a shout as Anderson came down the log ladder. He was a favourite, it seemed.

Some of them greeted Scott too, and Dence, who was already rather above himself (having clearly been sampling the goods of the store), called out patronisingly, "Not too bad for a new chum."

That night the men slept in mosquito-netted rows under the verandah roof, while the inevitable rain poured down, and somebody's gramophone snarled

tiny songs from a neighbouring hut. Scott felt at peace. They were well on the way to fortune now—to fortune and . . .

Janie?

Why, of course. What other possibility was open—to Brutus, who was an honourable man?

“And so that’s how you get gold?”

Anderson, standing in the bed of a river, shook the last of the wet stones and gravel out of the shallow tin basin he was holding. In the midst of the round of white metal were one or two pinhead specks of dull yellow.

“That’s how you get it,” he said.

Scott looked on, fascinated. Gold! The thing you had to wring from other men, all the world over—the thing you sold your liberty for, lied and cheated for, maybe; worked for, six days through, so that on the eve of the seventh day another man might, grudgingly, hand you out two or three little pieces of it—gold, here, before his eyes, dipped out of the Kikiramu River—free!

You hired your team of boys, you took up your claim and worked it, you lifted tin dishes full of gravel and clay out of the water and shook them. And in your hand was gold.

Here, in the heart of New Guinea, the immemorial bargain of the world—so much liberty, so much of the free winds and the stars and the seas, so much of your own soul and your own hopes and

dreams against so much hard yellow metal, held no longer. You paid with your body for what you got, not with your soul. You were hard-worked and hungry and thirsty, you held your life in your hand, you faced dangers, and abandoned luxuries—but it was at your own command. And the gold you won was clean. There was none in the world so clean as this. Other gold came soiled by a million hands, bloodstained, tarnished with sweat and tears. This at least was pure: no one had ever cheated, slaved, or oppressed to get it. You had never seen or thought of the dirt on all the other gold, but you saw it now, because of the cleanness of this.

Something of the kind passed through the new chum's mind as he stood beside Anderson in the welter of mud and water where the jolly Papuan boys were working hard with pick and shovel. That the gold had not been got without labour was clear enough. This claim was Anderson's, lying vacant under the nominal care of the warden for the last few weeks, while the owner went to recruit boys. What he had done here in the course of a few months, with his own head and hands and some dozen untrained Papuans, was almost incredible to Scott. The claim looked like a railway in process of making. The dense forest trees had been removed, the ground, cut down into a fifty-foot hollow for near a quarter of a mile, so that a wooded flat was transformed into a raw red cliff; hundreds

of tons of loose rock had been cleared away, and strata of earth peeled off like the skins of an onion. A fair-sized river had been coaxed down from its course two miles away, by means of a long race and several "flumes" or aqueducts, built bridge-wise over intervening gullies. This river had been let loose over the new cliff and the new valley, and now ran down Anderson's claim, clearing away the overburden of earth that lay on the stratum of gold-bearing "wash," and driving the gold, day by day, into the "box"—a hollowed log lined with stones, which was cleared out every week or so. You might at any time wash a dish for yourself, and see how much was probably draining into the box. This was what Anderson had been doing.

They were to start in a day or two on their prospecting trip; in the meantime, Anderson was occupying some of his leisure in showing Scott over a few of the nearer claims, including his own. This he was just about to give over to a friend, as mining law forbids a man to hold two claims, and the trip would necessitate empty hands on the part of all three prospectors.

The engineer was fascinated; he had no idea that gold-mining could be so interesting. He showered questions upon Anderson, and picked up facts—as the miner afterwards admitted, out of his pupil's hearing—like a pigeon picking up peas. Scott's intellect was a good tool finely handled; he was no genius, but his mind went where he wanted it to go,

and did what he required it to do. In the course of that morning he learned more about gold-mining and prospecting than many another would have learned in a month.

Anderson, the iron-faced, the silent, began to like him, and even to feel somewhat proud of his new chum pupil. It was with a view of showing him off that he took him down to another claim a mile or two away, and introduced him to another miner—a white anæmic creature with glittering eyes, who was seated on a log overlooking the boys.

It seemed that his day's work was done, for he rose as they came up and began shaking the clay off his boots, tightening his loosened belt and pushing down his hat on his head, while the boys, who were doing something to the "box," straightened up at his whistle and began to climb the bank. Down here at the bottom of the river-gorge, stifled by overhanging trees, one felt the heat oppressively; the afternoon thunderstorm was banking up in the north-west, purple and pewter-grey, and the witches' dance of cloud-wreaths was beginning across the dark green summits of the valley. It certainly seemed time to go home.

"Going up to the store?" asked Anderson of the white-faced man, who looked as if he had been literally boiled in the steaming woods of the Kikiramu, and boiled so long that he was quite overdone.

"No," said the other, looking at Scott.

"Been washing up, haven't you?" asked the latter. "What did you get?"

The white-faced man looked at him again and replied—

"Did you ever hear how Tom Mackay grew so fat?" (mentioning a publican well known in the territory).

"No," replied Scott, rather bewildered.

"It was," said the miner, pausing at the turn-off of another track, "by minding his own business."

He turned his back and disappeared down a dark green tunnel of leafage lit with dangling orchid blooms.

"I reckon I've got to do some talking to you," observed Anderson at this juncture. "You'd better understand that we don't ask each other questions like that. You're my partner, and I didn't mind your asking me just now what I was getting out of my claim, though it was no particular business of yours anyway—but don't ask the men what they're making, and, particularly, don't let a man think you're spying about his wash-up. Do you understand?"

"I do," said Scott, with a good temper that disarmed the other at once. "And now I'm going to do some talking to you. Why hadn't you savvy enough to see what he was wearing round his waist?"

"Round his waist?"

"His belt was snakeskin—an unusually big

python, if I may make a guess after being so short a time in the country."

"Snakeskin?" Anderson was still puzzled.

" 'Where the big python killed our dog,' " quoted Scott. "I'm no Sherlock Holmes—neither are you, it seems—but that looks to me enough of a clue to be worth an inquiry or so."

"My word!" A pause. "I'm going after him; I'll see you at the store."

When the three partners met again that evening round the log table that was fixed outside the store building for meals, Anderson was wearing a snake-skin belt, made from a very large python.

"I paid four weights for that," he remarked, pointing it out.

Scott was about to say something, but Anderson checked him with a glance. They were alone at the table: privacy, however, was scarce compatible with a split log wall behind, and a cook getting ready the dinner within short onion-range of the human nose.

At the store kept on the field by the philanthropic Carter and his wife (the latter absent for the moment) no one was charged anything for meals or beds. True, meals were plain tin and biscuit for the most part, and beds meant a yard or two of space beneath the verandah wherein to pitch one's mosquito net. Also, the miners got most of their stores there, and they drank "for the good of the house," so that Carter's pickle-jars of coarse river-gold waxed many between the runs of the launch; and

Carter's castles in Spain, which were situated in the Toorak quarter of Melbourne, grew wide and tall. But, nevertheless, he was a good-natured old fellow, and liked to see his boarders enjoy themselves.

After dinner was over the three partners, at a sign from Anderson, strolled away from the store and up on to the great log staircase that led to the top of the gully. In any other country the staircase would have been regarded as a fine piece of difficult road-making—it is not the easiest thing in the world to make a way, practicable for heavily loaded carriers, and stable in a constant rainfall of several feet per month, up a greasy clay slope of one in three, through dense forests matted with undergrowth. But in the Country of the Impossible, impossible things have to be done every day. A handful of raw cannibals had made that track in a week or two, and made it well. The miners topped it as lightly as girls tripping in satin shoes up a ball-room stairway. Near the summit there was a shady bit where you could sit down on one of the cross-way logs close to the big trees on the top of the ridge and look away over the rolling sea of treetops to the peeping blue crests of some unknown German New Guinea range.

The three men got out their pipes and began to smoke. Then Anderson spoke, looking at the far-off fingers of lilac smoke that marked the camps in the dense green of the "bush."

"You got it all right that time. Gabriel told me about the belt. He bought the skin from Cripps' cook-boy after he died. I didn't want to ask too much about it, and Gabriel is a bit of a hatter anyhow—almost forgotten how to talk, he's been here so long. But he did say something that's going to be of use to us."

Anderson paused provokingly to draw at his pipe. In the moment before he began to speak again the two others saw brilliant and amazing visions,—little parcels the size of your hat, sewn up in ship canvas and monstrous heavy, like those the storekeeper had in his safe—suites of state cabins on the P. & O.—long grey motor-cars with glass wind-shields built to do seventy an hour—horses in a string, clothed and hooded and out for exercise on an empty heath, under grey skies of the North—thousand-ton yachts with clipper bows and mirrored saloons, and the blue-and-biscuit coloured shores of Italian coasts, and bays showing up through the satin-hung ports—the kingdoms of the earth and the glory of them . . . all to be wrenched out of this wilderness of the Kikiramu bush.

"It seems," went on Anderson, "that the cook-boy died too—he pegged out with dysentery not long after he got down to the Kikiramu camp. But before that he'd sold the skin to Gabriel, and told him where it was got."

Two eager faces were turned to Anderson. The afternoon thunderstorm was coming up fast: it was

nearly over the valley now, darkening the dark of the treetops, blackening the shadowy wolf-throat of the gorge.

The river, hidden far away below, talked thin and clear through the threatening hush of the skies.

"He said," went on the miner, "that Cripps killed the python on an island in a creek, where it had been living in a hollow tree. Now, that must have been a fair-sized island, and a big tree, I reckon, for the python was an all-right big one. He said, too, that Cripps and the boy had a big fight to kill the brute, and that it smashed their dog up in its coils like a bit of biscuit. That shows the other boys weren't there—so they couldn't have told us where the brute was killed. All we've got to go on is that bit of description, but it may be worth everything to us. I think our chances don't look too bad. The two chaps we got on Ferguson can probably find the country he was working in, and once we get so far we can locate the creek if we've any luck at all. That was a lucky shot of yours, Scott."

Scott's eyes were sparkling with pleasure, but Dence looked more sober.

"It sounds all right, but this is a rotten bad country for givin' you surprises," he remarked. "However, we'll know before long. Scoot, you fellows, if you want us to miss that storm: it's just openin' its mouth."

It did open its mouth with a vengeance some two

or three minutes later, but by that time the three were under shelter in the verandah of the store, after a flying dive down the giant stairway that would have given points to Graham-White or the Wright Brothers. There was nobody seated on the rough log bench or lounging over the long table that the store proprietor had made by the simple process of leaving four young trees in their native earth and nailing packing-case boards across the stumps. The store building clung to the hip of the gorge like a swallow's nest set on a wall: from one side of the verandah Scott could throw the ashes out of his pipe right into the young, salad-green foliage at the top of a hundred-foot tree. In front the immense drop-curtain of dark forest that shut off a full third of the sky was swiftly disappearing behind a curdled flood of mist. Before the men had shaken off the stray drops of rain from their hats and faces the landscape had been spirited away, and the store, like some new Noah's ark, was set afloat upon a trackless sea, islanded only by the tops of the highest trees.

They stood looking down at the driven breakers of mist and at the snapping sheets of lightning that leaped between almost ceaseless stamps and thumpings of thunder. And in the mist they saw—what the men of Phœnicia saw when they set their high-beaked ships for unknown Africa—what Cortez and his steel-breasted soldiers saw when they fought through Mexico in search of the Land of Gold long

ago: what the men who made West Australia saw, in the drought-smitten nineties, when they tramped across the fiery plains strewn white with skeletons of horse and man, to the deserts and gullies that bore

“Death in their hands, but gold!”

.

“If we don’t get off to-morrow,” said the ‘new chum,’ “will you let me go down and work your claim for a day?”

“I reckon we shan’t get off,” answered Anderson. “One or two of the boys seem to need a spell. Yes, of course you can: I’ll make you a present of all you get—it won’t be much.”

“I don’t care whether it’s much or little,” declared Scott, his boyish face lighting up with a certain hard eagerness, “and I don’t want to keep it—but I feel as if I must go and handle it some more—wash out the dirt, and see the little yellow specks at the bottom, and put them together. . . . This gold-digging’s a queer thing—it gets hold of you, somehow.”

“A few other men before you have noticed that,” observed Anderson dryly.

“The little yellow specks! Don’t say I didn’t warn you against them,” put in Dence. “There’s nothing like them for getting hold of you, body and soul! Whiskey isn’t in it. A girl isn’t in it—even if she is a lovely little——”

"What?" said Scott, turning round sharply.

"A lovely little lassie in the North of Ireland," finished Dence, with something that Scott described to himself as "a rather three-cornered look." "Or a dozen—I'm sure you left quite a dozen of the braw Antrim leddies crying into their Robins and Beaver linen handkerchiefs on the Fleetwood boat quay—agh, man dear, sure ye did!"

"I don't care for that sort of joke very much," said Scott patiently.

"Then I'll change the conversation to something altogether different. Do you know that there's a mail going out to-morrow? The R.M. is sending down boys to the landing to meet the *Dragon-Fly* before she goes back."

"A mail to Samarai?" said Scott, and could have bitten his tongue out immediately after.

"To everywhere, via Samarai," answered Dence, the three-cornered expression just a little more visible than before.

"Then I'll see about getting some letters ready, if there's pen and ink to be had here," said Scott.

But, somehow or other, after he had directed and stamped the pencilled letter to Janie that had been growing at odd moments all the journey through, he did not feel like finishing his correspondence. How could you write letters that . . . letters which . . . well, anyhow, important letters—sitting at a log table on an open verandah, with stray miners passing in and out of the store every now and then? Be-

sides, there was too much noise. When people had gone to bed . . .

By eleven o'clock lights were out, and mosquito nets up all along the verandah. The Kikiramu, swollen with rain, sent up a leaden rumble from the bottom of the gorge. The mopokes wailed like homeless ghosts away in the blackness of the bush. There was no moon; the rain poured in the dark.

Scott slipped out of his bunk, pyjama-clad, and lit a hurricane-lamp. No one was in the store, and the big counter made an excellent writing-table. He covered several sheets of paper, writing without a pause, closed, stamped, and directed the envelope, and put it in the box left for mails.

When he crept back to his bunk he did not sleep, but lay thinking for a long time.

"I'm glad I wrote," he decided. "She will feel she has a friend. 'Anything I can do, at any time—call me—send for me'—yes, that was the right way to put it. If we make a lot out of this discovery—why, if one has money enough, and will enough, one can do almost anything—without people finding out. And she'll want help—little Charmian! the little bird that should have lived in a safe, quiet nest . . . she'll never make it, all alone. . . ."

For he knew what Charmian did not, that even the small foothold she had secured, in her uncongenial work as barmaid, was tottering beneath her feet. Figg had been repenting his generosity in

engaging her, for some time, and had not scrupled to say so. It was true that she was pretty, but that didn't do much good to his bar, when she was so shy and stuck up that hardly a man dared to speak to her,—why, she was enough to frighten away his custom into Bunn's! A bouncing North Queensland girl, who would joke and laugh, and take her share of drink, for the good of the house—that would have been a dozen times better.

Mother Figg, for the moment, was holding out in favour of Charmian: she was, as has been explained, a thoroughly good-natured woman, and felt sorry for the innocent little waif. How long her good nature would continue to hold out against a diminishing tale of receipts was another matter, however. . . . Yes, Scott felt glad he had sent the letter—though he was not certain, now he thought it over, that he had not worded it a little—perhaps a good deal—more warmly than was fair—to the other.

But even if he had she would never see it: and, Heaven knew, he had meant no disloyalty.

Next morning the rain was over, and the river had run itself down a good deal. Anderson pronounced his claim quite fit to work, if Scott really wanted to try his hand, and told the newcomer what to do—to take one or two of the boys, and set them to work shifting the big stones in the creek, so as to leave the “wash” free: to see the boys loosen it

up with their picks, and spade the gravel that carried the gold into the current that led through the "box": later in the day, to lift the big stones out of the hollow tree-trunk through which the water ran, gather up all the small stones, gravel, and clayey stuff at the bottom by degrees, and wash it out in the prospecting dish over a still pool. Whatever he got he might keep, Anderson insisted, with the miner's generosity: and Scott agreed, for the excitement of the hunt had got him, and he ached to finger gold of his very own, found by himself. In any case, Anderson meant to dispose of the claim before leaving the Kikiramu; so all that was got was saved from some unknown successor.

He did not return all day. It grew very hot: the treetops in the gorge rose up still as spires in the windless noon: the distant peaks of the German ranges rumbled coming thunder. Anderson was quietly busy, tallying stores with Carter and overlooking the painted canvas swags for leaks or tears: answering questions now and then, as other men drifted into the store, and asked him about his prospecting trip. He was very quiet, very unembarrassed: quite ready to discuss the journey with anyone who wanted, but not much interested in it or anything else. The miners "reckoned" he did not expect very much from the trip, but thought it better business than working on a rather poor claim in the unprosperous Kikiramu. Dence was drinking more than was good for him, and seemed inclined

to be quarrelsome: one would almost have thought he had something on his mind.

Dinner passed over: it was rather a good dinner, considering the poor materials, and the few miners who had dropped in, after the casual fashion of the Kikiramu, remarked on the cooking. Carter, a nebulous little person, all beard and hat, who was supposed scarcely to know his own name, unless his wife were there to tell it to him, murmured something about a cook: new fellow just come up from Samarai: lazy brute who slept in the cookhouse all the time he wasn't getting meals, but was well worth his tucker and screw, because he could do more with a tin of "dog" and a handful or so of flour than most men could. Hadn't wanted a cook, but had to take him when he came along the other day, because the fellow was "stony," and had scarce a pair of boots to his feet, and anyhow, there was no harm in him. Seemed he meant to start prospecting when he had got enough to hire a few boys. More fool he: the Kikiramu was nearly about done. Thus Carter, mumbling in his beard, and not listened to—no one ever listened to Carter, his wife least of all.

It grew to afternoon: the rain came up roaring, fell, and passed, leaving a pleasant freshness in the stifling valley. The sun got behind the crest of the giant forest billow above the store, sent out magnificent rays of gold and thunder-blue through the treetops, and disappeared. The German peaks were

yet in full day, but darkness was coming very fast down in the gorge where the Kikiramu ran.

Not till the rising flood of night lay deep on stone and stream and washed about the higher reaches of the great log staircase on the cliff did Scott return from his work. The boys trailed after him, hungry and tired. They had had their usual "spell" and food, but the Taubada (chief) had taken neither, and had driven them all day as the mule-drivers drove the mules that carried from Port Moresby to the ranges of the Astrolabe. There was no sense in the thing, for they were not on good gold—no one knows better than a trained mine labourer just what his master is getting—and there was therefore no precedent for frenzied working, such as the older boys had seen and joined in, time and again, with willing hands, when Jimmy So-and-so, or Bobby The-Other, had struck it rich, and was taking more out of a few yards in a day than half a dozen other claims were producing in a week.

If the boys were tired, however, Scott, who had been working harder than any of them all day, looked quite fresh. He was unspeakably dirty, but that seemed to trouble him not at all—though as a general rule he was somewhat of a dandy about his clothes, and always eager for a clean up when he had had a dirty job to do. Now, he came into the store, dripping clay and water all over the dry earthen floor, and, leaning on the bar, flung down an exceedingly unclean pocket-handkerchief tied into

a knot in the middle. Undoing the knot, he spilled the contents into his dirty palm, and held it out to Anderson.

"How much is that?" he said eagerly.

Anderson put the few flakes and grains of dull gold into the store-keeper's scales.

"Just on fifteen weights," he said. "Not too bad for a beginner. I dare say you let as much get away down stream."

"That's two pounds sixteen shillings," commented Scott, gazing at the gold hungrily. "It's an awfully rum thing, but, do you know, I feel as if I'd never got any gold that was really mine before."

He took the grains back into his hand and caressed them.

"It is—fascinating," he said.

Dence, somewhat "flown with insolence and wine," strolled into the bar from his lounging-seat on the verandah. That dimly perceptible aura of long-ago London—London of hansom-cabs and victorias, of camellia buttonholes, of the early days of Gilbertian comic opera—clung close about him to-day: and the phantom single eyeglass was almost plain to see. He pulled his drooping yellow moustache with one hand and surveyed the curious little scene before him. Scott, curled over his gold like a cat with its kitten, did not notice him.

"The mail is gone," said Dence, his English drawl a little more marked than usual. "Carriers

got away early; they'll catch the *Dragon-Fly* to-morrow, and the letters will get to Samarai in time for the *Matunga's* down trip."

"Eh?" said Scott absently, stroking a flake with his finger-tip.

"The mail's away."

"What mail?"

Dence laughed—unpleasantly—and moved out again. Scott looked up with the expression of one who awakes.

"Oh—the mail—of course!" he said.

Anderson, busy with swags and tins, cast a glance of his imperturbable green eyes in the direction of the two. You could not have told what he thought. You never could tell what Anderson thought.

CHAPTER VIII

GREEN forest was round them, dark green forest always. Green forest was over them, a hundred feet above their heads. They saw green forest wave on wave, when they halted half a day on the crest of a hill to fella lookout, and find where they might be. When the forest was far away it looked purple; very far away it looked pale blue. It reared itself up towards the sun-bleached sky sometimes, on the necks of the shouldering ranges, three, and five, and eight, and ten thousand feet: it flowed down again, smooth and deep, over straight-falling precipices and gigantic foothill stairs, into unsounded depths of river gorges. And at the bottom of the forest sea the explorers struggled on, day by day, towards the creek, and the island, and the gold.

"Go up the Iri first of all," had been Anderson's decision. The Iri, one of many rivers unmarked on any map, and only known some ten or fifteen miles back from the mouth, had always been considered a "likely" stream by the miners of the Kikiramu country. Cripps had certainly started up that river when he left the field on the last journey of his chequered life. After striking the Iri, Anderson

said they would find out from the boys what creeks or branches Cripps had followed. On one of these creeks—impossible to guess where—there would be an island with a big hollow tree: and from that island they would begin the tracing out of the problem indicated by the letter. Scott, new to the work, and as eager to “fling his heart before him” here, in the Papuan bush, as he had been long ago when steering a four-year-old across stiff country behind the Killultagh Harriers, wanted to map out the whole plan of campaign in the evenings after supper, while the three white men sat under their narrow fly, smoking and sheltering from the steamy rain. But Anderson, who knew better than he the risk of getting a fixed idea on the brain, in these formidable solitudes, declined to go into the matter at all, beyond what was necessary from day to day. They had to find the creek and the island first, he said. They had better take things easy, and not worry.

In truth, as the days went on, the high-strung Celt, with his nervous pluck, and that other, whose brain was eaten into at the finest points by the nibbling caterpillar of drink, felt more and more strongly the advantage of journeying under the guidance of such a man as Anderson. For him “the hardest work was never too hard, or the longest day too long.” He was never anxious, never discouraged. His iron-bark face never showed annoyance or fear: to the latter, indeed, he was as

nearly insensible as a human being could be. There was one hideous day when the little expedition, imprisoned in a deep stone-walled gorge they had been following for some days, found themselves likely to be caught like sewer rats in a drain by a thunderstorm that was threatening above their heads. If it came and got them there—there, where they had to climb and leap down the centre of the river on the tops of the boulders, because there was not footing for a fly anywhere near the edge—not one of the party would live half an hour. Scott knew this as well as the others, for he had seen the mountain rivers of Papua rise after rain, and knew what they could do when confined to a natural race like this gorge of beetling stone. In such a place the rapids raised by a sudden flood might be heard half a mile away, like the roar of countless railway trains all approaching one junction together. . . . You would not hear another sound, even if four-and-thirty human beings, caught in a trap, were being beaten to death among those cruel rocks. . . .

That afternoon the expedition walked in the shadow of near and ugly death from two o'clock till six. The roll of distant thunder from the ranges sounded in their ears like the turning of the hinges on Eternity's opening gates. A flash of lightning stabbed as if it had struck. A drop of rain falling on a man's hand came heavy as coffin-lead. For, if the clouds once broke, and still there were no way up and out, twenty brief minutes would see the end.

The poor black boys, heavy laden with their swags, scrambled along at top speed, frightened, yet not realising all the danger. Dence made little jokes now and then about "old Peter" looking out for them at the gate, and about the white night-dresses and spiky crowns they would have to try and sleep in that night. Scott, sickeningly reluctant to die, could do nothing but hold his tongue and get along over the stones, his whole being aflame against the relentless powers that were threatening to blot him out, here and now, without the gold, without the woman, without anything at all but a black cold vacancy into which he scarcely dared to look—alone. And Anderson——

Anderson kept the party at the highest pace it could make, slacking when necessary, pressing on as he saw the boys and the white men could stand it. He watched the sky, and he watched the beetling walls of the gorge. He climbed those walls again and again, and again and again fell back, beaten, bleeding, but not discouraged. Dence was swaggering in the face of death, Scott, in his heart, was cursing, but Anderson was just as he was when checking goods in Carter's store, or overseeing the clearing of their track. He had something to do, and was doing it. He would go on doing it till there was no more to be done.

And Scott, through all the struggling, and the exhaustion, and the smothering heat, and the growing dark—dark that might never lift to dawn for

them—saw, and wondered at, the soul of a man who knew not fear.

They escaped. When the rain had actually broken, and the ominous talk of the river about their feet was rising to a rattling snarl, one of the mountain boys pointed out a crack in the side of the cliff. Anderson was into it and swarming up like a chimney-sweep in a chimney before the boy had finished speaking. There was a moment of suffocating suspense, and then—

“Sling me a line,” called Anderson above the gathering death-roar of the river. “You can all get a start up the cliff if I haul.”

Dence was very gay in the camp that night, up on the crest of the cliff, with the flooded river thundering below. He sang comic songs, and was imitative, and witty, and rather profane. Scott felt tired enough to sink through his canvas bunk into the ground beneath: his store of nervous force was an emptied cistern, run dry by the strain of the day. Anderson sewed rough patches on his clothes, and made a few remarks about the favourite for the Melbourne Cup. The afternoon was over: he was not thinking about it at all.

“When are we going to strike the Iri?” asked Scott.

There was—for once—something of a view this

morning. They had camped on the top of one of the usual knife-edge ridges, just where the fall of a huge cottonwood had cleared away a cañon of forest. There, one could look out and away, over the billowing world of treetops, coloured dainty emerald green in the six o'clock sun, and creased here and there, deeply and softly as an arm creases at the elbow, to show where the unseen river valleys ran. One could see the royal purple of the five-thousand-foot peaks, with the mists of day just beginning to gather in bridal veils of cloud about their heads, and one could glimpse, very far away, the chalcedony blue of mighty unknown crests, Dianas of the mountain world, ever desired, and ever unwon.

It was a magnificent view. But when you have spent a week or two in learning the inner meaning of magnificent views, considered not as landscape, but as routes of travel, you are likely to look upon the most beautiful of scenery with a somewhat callous eye. The three white men only saw that the country ahead was "the same old thing," and Scott, at least, sighed a little.

Half a dozen of the boys, who had been looking anxiously (in a direction many points removed from the right one) for a glimpse of the sea that would take them back to their island homes, created a diversion by flinging themselves upon the ground and weeping bitterly.

"We-fellow never go back some time no more,"

wailed the biggest, a sturdy little savage with a mop of hair as big as a sofa-cushion. "Altogether we-fellow finish along this place. No good this place." He howled like a dog.

"Oh, stop your confounded row!" said Dence. They had all been hoping to get a sight of the Iri from this point, and everyone was feeling the disappointment too much to have any sympathy with this Papuan Mrs. Gummidge, who persisted in "feeling it more."

"I don't know," said Anderson in reply to Scott's question. "This is all untrodden country, and nobody knows exactly how the Iri runs: we can only guess at the way it ought to. We're far enough up country now to strike the upper waters, if we could find it—you know, there's no looking for gold on the lower waters of a river."

"What are you going to do?"

"Strike west of this, I reckon. By the lie of those hills there should be a big river somewhere near the horizon. We might hit it in a couple of days."

"Or mightn't?"

"Or mightn't. We'd better, though. The tucker won't last forever."

"Well," said Scott, after a minute's pause, "exploring is interesting enough—and exciting—but it isn't at all like what one fancied."

"I know what you fancied," observed Dence. "You were to start in the early morn, with the dew-

drops twinklin' on the grass, and step out gaily over a palmy plain, carryin' your trusty shot-gun, and singin' as you went. You'd camp for lunch beside a boundin' brook——"

"They bound all right," put in Anderson dryly.

"Don't interrupt my beautiful English—beside a boundin' brook, where you'd light a fire and roast the deer and the bears and the wild boars you'd shot as you came along. In the evenin', beside the glowin' camp-fire, song and story and jest——"

"Oh, shut it, Dence, I'm not a new chum now, and I never was such an idiot as you make out. But it's true enough that I didn't realise the food difficulty. It seems that every expedition splits on that rock."

"Sooner or later—the idea is to make it as late as possible," said Anderson. "I suppose it's about the hungriest country in the world. You get a pig or a wallaby once in a blue moon, and as to food from the natives, it's like what the Frenchman at sea said when they asked him if he'd had his breakfast —'Quite the contrary.'"

"Yes, I rather guessed what they meant when they pinched our arms and legs at that little village the other day," agreed Scott. "And small as it was, it was the only one we've seen. This is a God-forsaken place."

"As to God-forsaken, I won't argue," said Anderson. "But as to men—there are probably a good many more than we've any idea of."

“Do you mean they’re stalking us?” asked Scott, with a queer little adventurous feeling stealing through him.

“I wouldn’t worry about that. Look here, do you see where the country seems to take a bit of a lean down towards the west? That’s where we’re going to head for now. Time we got off. Dence, don’t loaf, it’s your job to see the tents struck, and you oughtn’t to want telling. You hurry up and help me with the carriers, Scott: get a move on you. I believe we’ll have the rain early to-day.”

The party took up the hand-to-hand fight with nature once more, at the point where it had been abandoned last night. . . . All day scrambling up and plunging down: edging along impossible gorges where indignant white cockatoos skimmed and shrieked through blue vacancy, below the toes of your rusty, string-laced boots: climbing down where you never could get up, and up where you certainly never could get down again: creeping, half a mile an hour, behind the boys and their slashing knives, through dense green jungle where the sunlight dripped down like starshine into a well; seeing your hands wrinkle up like a washerwoman’s with the ceaseless soak of perspiration, and watching the other men’s shirts stick in black patches to their back and arms: smelling the forest smell of wet earth and sopping mosses, and hearing—when the party halted for a moment to bring some straggler

into line—the aloof, unfriendly murmur of the giant trees that shut away the day, and the treacherous low-voiced talk of baffling rivers that struck up hands of prohibition across your track, a dozen times in a morning. . . .

Yet withal, to-day was not quite as yesterday. The brooding sense of solitude was gone.

One listened for cracking sticks in the forest. One saw shadows that moved . . . did they not? . . . in the dark where the river walls curved in, behind the many waterfalls. One fancied the birds, that rose screaming out of glades as deep and green as the midmost Coral Seas, had been frightened . . . by what?

When one halted for lunch, one sat on a fallen log, eating one's measured ration of tin and biscuit, with an odd feeling about one's shoulder-blades—a feeling that made one want to look round—at nothing—and reflect, without any apparent reason, that a brick wall was a comfortable thing to lean against . . . if one had it.

And when the tiring hour of three o'clock came round, that hour that tests endurance and spirit, for men on the march, as surely as Wellington's three-o'clock-in-the-morning tests military courage, one felt, as always, that sundown, supper, and sleep were as far away as Paris or St. Petersburg: and one felt, too, that something else—something intangible, a brooding weight upon the heavy air, a shade upon

the shadow of the eternal forests—was . . . not so very far away.

About four o'clock, as they were creeping in Indian file up the face of a deeply-wooded slope, something happened. An arrow out of nowhere in particular (who could tell, in that chaos of jungle?) went past Dence's shoulder with a kind of low whoop, and plunged a foot and a half into the earth of the rise. Another skimmed so close to Scott's head that he was not sure whether he had been hit or not, until he saw the weapon quivering in the trunk of a tree. It went deep into the solid wood. . . . One could not help thinking, in a swift, unpleasant "aside," that the human body was a mushy sort of thing at best. Soft tearable skin, pulpy internal organs, that a chance prick would disable—what an unsatisfactory fragile engine wherewith to confront the—there it went again! just missed the head boy, and set the others howling! Was anyone hit?

"Put down your swags, and get your rifles ready," said Anderson to the boys, in exactly the same tone that he used when ordering them to halt for lunch. The boys, chattering with excitement, obeyed. The white men had already shouldered their arms. They were all facing the same way—across the track—it seemed that Anderson, at least, knew whence the arrows were coming. Scott caught a glimpse of Dence's face, and scarcely knew it: it was suddenly younger, and the blue eyes glittered. He saw his

own left hand extended along the rifle barrel, and felt the cool steel of the trigger against the middle finger of the right.

"Look out. Now then, fire into the bush!" said Anderson, firing himself as he spoke.

The boys had been drilled now and then throughout the trip, but their excitement got the better of them now, and a good many shots flew up into the tops of the trees—some went perilously near the whites. Anderson, Dence and Scott aimed for the thickest part of the forest, and shot straight into it.

The smoke cleared away. The chorus of bird-screams died. Silence, a hundred times more still than the virgin quiet of the forest undisturbed by man, fell upon the bush and track. Then, from far away in the gloomy green, a cry rose. It lifted and lifted, thin and sharp-edged. It sank, full of protest, rattled and broke. And Scott, who had seen men die, but never heard one before, knew, nevertheless, that in the seconds of that cry, the green forest, and the sun, and the good days and nights of warm, familiar earth had dropped away, for one poor Papuan soul, into the dark.

"That's enough," said Anderson, lowering his rifle. He opened the breech, and replaced the cartridge just fired. The boys dropped their guns, and fell into line again. Dence, with that sparkle still on his face, ranged up to the other men.

"I believe I bagged the bird," he said. "That cry came from the very place I aimed at."

"I'm glad I didn't," said Scott, a sense of relief passing over him like a breath of cool air. He felt—not exactly sorry, not shocked, but just a little seasick. Anderson threw a glance at him.

"It has to be done," he said, and started the column again.

One of the boys, an Orokiva, was so delighted with the little brush, that he could not be got on for a minute or two; he seemed to have gone "kava-kava" for the moment, and stood and danced in the pathway, singing a war-chant.

"Stir that beggar up with a stick, Dence, and let's go on," called Anderson from the head of the column.

"Hold on a bit," said Dence. "He's singin' a very rummy sort of song, this Johnnie, and I want to hear what it is. I know some Orokiva."

"Oh, you know every lingo in the country, I reckon," said Anderson, "but this isn't a time for studying philology. Get him on."

"You wait," persisted Dence.

The boy finished his song, came down to earth again, and promptly demanded tobacco. Dence, as promptly, poked him in the back with his rifle, and started him into the column.

"Got the artistic temperament bad, that chappie," he observed. "Always wants refreshment after expressin' itself, the artistic temperament does. Prima-donna needs Perrier-Jouët in her dressin'-room, painter and his model have a can of beer

from round the corner, I want half a dozen drinks of any sort you like, when I've been more than commonly eloquent and amusin'. And this Papuan Johnnie wants tobacco, after doin' his little bit."

"You're talking too much," said Anderson, with pioneer simplicity.

"I'll talk more by and by," answered Dence, falling silent. Scott thought his behaviour rather odd, but there was plenty to think about just then, with the pace that Anderson chose to set through the jungle, and the impression did not remain long upon his mind.

No one said much about the attack; it seemed to be a matter of small importance to the two old hands, once it was over, and Scott himself was astonished to find how little it had really impressed him, beyond the immediate horror of that dying cry. They halted to cut a small lookout, by and by: and Anderson informed them that the Iri was not very far away. Nothing whatever was to be seen but the usual ocean of treetops, but the trend of the various slopes seemed to have conveyed something to the eye of the trained bushman, that Scott was powerless to understand.

"There's a big sago swamp down there," said Anderson, pointing to a slight variation in the texture of the forest at one spot a good way off. "If we can make that before sundown, we'll camp near it. We shall have to start crossing it early to-

morrow: one had better not get stuck in a swamp in the dark."

"Might get drowned, I suppose?" asked Scott.

"I don't think you'd get drowned," was Anderson's reply. "Go on, boys."

At sundown they were near the swamp, and there was fair camping-ground available, also water. After supper, pickets were chosen from among the boys, and Anderson told the white men that they also would keep watch and watch through the night. He did not expect any attack, he said, but in this country it was as well to leave no possible loophole for accident.

After supper, at eight o'clock, Scott and Anderson turned in, while Dence kept watch. At eleven, Scott was to relieve him. Anderson would take duty at two, and wake the whole company at five.

They were all rather more tired than usual that night, and Scott's turn seemed to him to come before he had fairly closed his eyes. Dence had left him part of a billy-can of strong cold tea (Anderson had forbidden fires), and he swallowed it at a draught, to drive away the sleepiness that held down his eyelids. It was very dark, and very still. The boys were sleeping like the dead, beneath their faintly glimmering white flies, all save the two yawning sentries, who had to be found and felt for in the dark now and then, and poked up with the butt of a rifle. Apart from that duty, one had nothing to do but sit on a log, wonder if there were

many snakes in the neighbourhood, and listen to the soft sliding of the little creek beside which they had camped, into the unseen swamp.

Scott opened his watch and felt the face. Twelve o'clock—two hours more. It was getting almost cool; his hands were dry, and the perspiration had ceased trickling down the back of his neck. A bell-bird sounded from a long way off—tank-tank!—just like a horse-bell.

One o'clock. Scott began to want a drink. It would be easy to step down into the bed of the little creek, where it widened out to join the swamp, and put one's face in a pool. . . .

Three or four steps in the dark—this liana stuff was a nuisance; one could not bend down. . . .

By heaven, that was a curious smell! Could the water be good to drink? was there anything dead in it? And yet—the smell was not exactly like putrid stuff; it was loathsome, yet scented in a way—like—like—a perfumed corpse.

Scott sniffed—sniffed again. He did not like it, though he could not tell why. Something impelled him to turn backwards in the dark up the sloping bank, and find his way to the flies again, thirsty as he was. After all, it was only half an hour or so now. . . .

Close on two o'clock; almost time to awaken Anderson. He would. . . . Great God, what was that?

There are no cattle in the Papuan wilds, but it

sounded like the roaring of a bull. There are no ocean liners on the Iri, yet it seemed as if the siren of a steamer had been suddenly let off within fifty yards of the camp. A horrible sound, a sound to make a man's blood run cold, heard in those mysterious wilds, in the dark, with that loathsome smell so close at hand.

Scott stood still where he was, rifle ready to swing up on his shoulder, listening to the stirring and cackling of the awakened boys. It was only a few seconds before he felt Anderson's hand on his arm in the darkness.

"We'll have to chance the natives, and light a fire," said the miner. "This place is full of alligators—there!"

It was the hideous snarling bellow again, so near as to send a trembling through the air. From some way off, another answered it. A third and a fourth took up the cry. And the loathsome scented smell suddenly grew thicker.

"They're too close," said Anderson. "This must be the rendezvous of half the alligators in the country. I never heard so many together. This won't do."

He had half a dozen of the awakened boys up in a minute, and started them cutting wood by the light of a hurricane lantern. A fire was made, and the natives crowded round it, pushing each other almost into the flames, shuddering, looking back over their shoulders into the dark.

"Does a fire keep them off?" asked Scott, standing beside Anderson, and watching the impenetrable black under the trees.

"It ought to. There's really not much risk with a big party. Two or three natives by themselves would probably not have much chance. The fact is, you never can tell what an alligator will or won't do. Mostly, he's a cowardly brute, but sometimes he isn't. He gets desperate when really hungry—or if there are a lot of them. There it is again. Must be a sort of home for lost alligators, to judge by the row."

He slung his rifle up on his shoulder, and walked a few yards away.

"Can't see anything," he said, "but you can't see them in daylight often, when they're close at hand. I suppose they've smelt us out, and that's what is bringing them about. We have to cross the swamp to-morrow, but I think it'll be all right then."

The bellowing sounded farther off after the fire was lit, but did not cease altogether till sunrise. In the daylight, the swamp looked ugly enough. It was mostly black mud and slime, cut up by channels of stagnant, ill-smelling water. So many trees had fallen, however, that there was little difficulty making a way through, and when there was a big gap of choking mud, the boys readily bridged it with another tree. The mud was boiling with crabs and creeping things; the sun, scarce tempered by the thin fronds of the sago palms, struck fiercely on

the slow-moving column of Papuans and whites. It was less than two miles across the swamp, but they were not clear of it for near two hours. All the time the boys kept an eager, frightened watch for alligators, and the white men, too, were on the alert. But not a claw or a snout showed among the poisonous green weeds and grasses, not a sound rose from the simmering pools of scum.

"You see, they don't trouble in daylight," said Anderson.

He saw the last boy out of the swamp, set the way up another of the usual razor-back ridges, and took the lead. Dence and Scott were left as rear-guard.

"I say," said the latter, "what on earth did Anderson take us through that place for, anyhow? You can't ask him questions, unless you want your head bitten off, but I really want to know."

"Oh, it was reasonable enough," answered Dence. "By the way the Iri valley runs, we have saved a day's march, if not two, taking this route. We should have had a five thousand foot range to cross, which we've escaped."

"What would you take, to go across in the dark?"

"Nobody would take anything, to be such a bloomin' fool."

They were partly up the rise now, and they turned to look back. The swamp stretched below, black, simmering, sinister—a very witch's cauldron of evil.

Years afterwards, Scott remembered just how that

other looked—the glitter of the blue English eyes, staring far away at something that seemed beyond the range of his own sight: the sudden shadow that swept across those fine, worn features, like a dark wing fleeting over a sunny field. . . . It was gone—if it had ever been. Dence turned to face the hill again.

“ ‘ A goose walking over my grave! ’ ” he quoted, with a laugh. “ Give us a smoke, Scott—I’m out. This blessed country gets on your nerves.”

“ What was the boy singing yesterday? ” asked Scott, by and by, when they paused to breathe the carriers.

“ A queer thing,” answered the other. “ He was chantin’ his own bravery, of course, and about the guns, and the arrows the little beasts in the bush had been peggin’ at us. And then he was singin’ about——”

“ What? ”

“ Don’t quite understand it. He said his white men were brave, and the Orokivas were brave, but the other white man ran away into the bush. Now, there wasn’t any other white man.”

“ No, of course.”

“ But—I picked up a queer thing on the track—that time I went back for half a mile to find the compass I dropped—in the morning.”

“ Yes, I remember. What did you pick up? ”

“ Sprig belongin’ to a boot. Now, that’s nothin’ much—but Anderson’s boots have all the sprigs on,

and so have yours—I looked at your tracks. I lost one, but it was a week ago.”

“ Did the boys pick it up at the time? ”

“ Maybe—and maybe not.”

“ Why, what do you think? ”

“ Don’t know what I think—don’t know that I think anythin’—a fellow had better not think, out in the bush. . . . What the mischief are the boys raisin’ such a hullabaloo about? ”

The column had started on again while Dence and Scott talked, and was crawling, like a snake, a bit at a time, over the crest of the ridge. Those who were up had raised a cry of delight.

“ Coo-ee! ” yelled Dence to Anderson.

“ The Iri! ” called Anderson in reply.

“ That’s as good as a bottle of beer apiece! ” said Dence, suddenly galvanised into speed. The two fairly raced up the ridge, and arrived at the top together, panting and steaming, eager to see the river that was to lead them to their goal.

After all, they could see nothing, for the forest was deep and unbroken, but they could all hear the voice of an unmistakably big river, rumbling away far below. Anderson was standing on the spine of the ridge, his leathery face showing something like human satisfaction for once.

“ She takes a turn to the west—just as I guessed she would,” he said. “ This saves us days. We’ll camp on the bank to-night, and begin going up the river to-morrow.”

"How are we to find Alligator Creek?" asked Scott. "Where the box was, you know."

"If Alligator Creek isn't the creek that drains out of that swamp into the Iri, you may call me a Chinaman," averred Anderson. "Boys, we're getting on!"

That night in the camp by the side of the great dark river they had sought so long, many a Spanish castle was built, many a story told of wonderful finds, in the Magnet, in the Klondyke, in sun-dried Mexican river-beds, in monkey-haunted kloofs of inner Africa. They were all a little excited, and sleep was long in coming to the white men's tent. As for the song of the Orokiva, it was forgotten.

CHAPTER IX

THE days that followed were among the pleasantest of the trip.

In the first place, they had a rest. Anderson did not want to forego the chance of re-provisioning offered by the sago swamp: so camp was pitched on the bank of the Iri, and there three whites took it in turns to escort the boys back to the edge of the swamp every day, and oversee them while they cut down palms, chopped out the inside pith, washed it in troughs made of hollowed trunks, and collected the starchy matter that drained off. The floury, crumbly mass that resulted was not in the least like any sago ever seen in shops, but it was nourishing and palatable food, boiled with a little sugar, and whites and natives revelled in it, after the inevitable short commons of the march.

While the boys were busy making sago, and putting it up in mats of roughly plaited leaves, the white men repaired swags and flies, mended their clothes, wished they had anything to read, and talked a great deal. Anderson had removed the embargo on discussion, now that they had successfully accomplished the first stage of their search, and the letter (which everyone knew by heart) was talked over and over—especially at night, when the three were together.

It was a wonderfully lovely spot, this elbow of the Iri, where they had made their camp. The river, like all Papuan streams of the hinterland, was wild and precipitous; it ran boisterously over a bed full of rocks, and dashed foam and spray upon the dangling ferns and lianas, and rare flames of orchid bloom, that overhung its waters. There was a great booming waterfall quite close to the camp, with tree-ferns like green lace parasols hanging over it, and scarlet D'Alberti flowers, shaped like wistaria, spotting the cool gloom of the over-arching forest roof. Birds, crested, spangled, aigretted, orange, crimson, gold and blue, swooped and skimmed above the water-pools in the downward-spreading light of dawn, or in the strange green sunset glow—that "Ragnarok, Twilight of the Gods," known to all Papuan wanderers. Butterflies, strong bird-winged creatures, gold and velvet-black, vermilion, verdigris, and sapphire, struck the heart with their beauty, as they sailed like living flowers across the river of sun that cut the gloomy forest, above the river of rock and water. Dragon-flies, red, green, and yellow: inch-long flying things that scintillated in the sun like some new jewel, half-emerald, half-turquoise; how lovely they were, and how lovely it all was, to a man who was marching no longer, and had time and strength to note the wonder and the beauty of the unknown lands!

Scott liked it. He liked the colour and the stillness and the solitude, and yet more the feeling, new

and wonderful to him, of being in country where, in all probability, no white man's foot had passed—for they could not tell what route might have been taken by Cripps and his mate. To look at the great fall of the Iri, and know it was marked on no map—that the river leaped into the knowledge and mind of man just here, where his own eyes met it; beyond that little range of his sight, existed not at all, till he should find it—this was a sensation of keenest pleasure. To think of all that lay somewhere among the branches and tributaries of that stream, of the fortune that the wilderness held in its grip, for him and his mates to find, was an intoxication. Did the whole world hold a better way of making fortunes than this?

The ache in his heart was wonderfully soothed. Nothing was changed, but he felt as men do feel in the far-out places—that everything beyond the little circle of the daily task was very dim and distant, and that sorrows belonging to the outer world were almost as sorrows belonging to someone else—things that pained you with a gentle, impersonal sort of melancholy alone. . . . He began to understand how it was that the real men of the wilderness, these miners and their mates, who had lived on the fringes of the Never-Never half their lives, seemed so curiously detached from all human affections or ties. It was hard to believe that the men he had met on Kikiramu had mothers or brothers or relations of any kind—that they had ever had homes, or ever taken the

morning train to anywhere, with a daily paper in hand, or ever footed it in the merry dances of the Australian bush, when selectors' daughters and "cockatoo farmers" and stockmen and shearers made the earthen floors rise up in dust to the music of accordion and violin! Surely they had lived all their lives just as they were living them now—just as he was living his—in the dark of the eternal forests, hunting down and gathering the little yellow specks, and . . . what was the blank verse Dence had quoted?

"Lost to use and name, and life and fame . . ."

Not lost, of course—that was nonsense. Absorbed, perhaps—as he was absorbed. Who could think of Sydney and of London, of Germany's intentions towards Morocco, of the newest way to drop bombs out of *aéroplanes* upon an enemy's head, when he was thinking of, and looking for—gold?

"' . . . The tree that we made our box out of, at Alligator Creek,' " quoted Anderson, one morning. Quotations from Cripps' letter were as common in the talk of the three, these days, as texts in the mouths of Cromwell's Ironsides.

"' That we made our box out of . . . ' " He had got up from the felled log they used for a seat at meals, and was standing with his back to the river, looking into the bush, and pulling his long beard thoughtfully.

"That means," he said, "that they got something on Alligator Creek. It wasn't good, or they'd have stayed instead of going farther on. But we'll have to find it, I reckon, if we want to know what tree to look for at the right time."

Dence, in the full enjoyment of his after-breakfast smoke, looked up, and followed Anderson's eyes.

"Behind the swamp, of course," he said.

"Yes—a goodish bit, I should think. I don't believe Cripps came through just here. I've been working it out, and I reckon he struck Alligator Creek a good way farther up, and prospected there—it would be full of alligators all along, I suppose: some creeks are—and by and by moved on same as you and I would do, in the direction of the Iri: he'd strike a tributary some good way behind this, and probably got—what he got—there."

"Why not on the Iri itself?" asked Scott.

"Too big and too deep, here or anywhere near. You don't get gold—alluvial gold—where the water would carry a big steamer."

"And why do you think he didn't follow the Iri up to its higher waters?"

"Wasn't long enough out, from all I could gather. Take it from me, the gold's within two or three days of here—one way or another. We'll prospect Alligator Creek to-day, to try and find the first working and the box."

"Shall I get the boys together?"

"You might. I want to look about a little at the mouth of the creek and see what size it is, before we start."

"Thirty-two boys, isn't it?"

"No, thirty-one. What's the matter with you, Scott, that you can't remember the number of boys, after all this time?"

"Well, the counting hasn't been my job, because I didn't have them in the afternoons—but I certainly thought it was thirty-one."

"What did you say thirty-two for, then?"

"Because yesterday, when I went home in the middle of the day, I did happen to count them before I left, and there were thirty-two."

"You counted wrong."

"I did not. There were thirty-two. I counted three times."

"All our own boys—no stray natives from round about?"

"They'd all got red ramies on, and were making sago together."

"You must have been mistaken."

"I was not," repeated Scott, getting hot. "I saw them, and counted them."

"You take ten grains of quinine, and don't keep out in the sun without your hat: I've no time for people getting sick," was Anderson's only comment, as he walked off down the river.

Scott said something forcible, and Dence laughed.

"Quit laughin', you!" ordered the Ulsterman,

his native accent coming out strong, as it usually did in moments of irritation.

Dence, for the ten thousandth time in his life, quoted under his breath: "*It's not that one is so clever oneself: it's only that other people are so stupid. . . .*"

"I wasn't laughin' at you," he said. "Only at Anderson. For a death-or-glory kind of leader to an expedition, there isn't his match in Papua—but I really think he has even less brains than you, Scott."

"Thank you," said Scott, sensing an obscure compliment wrapped up somewhere or other. He could not always understand Dence, especially when the Englishman smiled with sleepy blue eyes, and spoke in the low, velvet voice that was so peculiarly his own. Dence had the power of creating odd illusions about himself. To-day, standing beside the stained and sagging tent that was all their home, his roughly booted feet set in river mud, his ragged shirt scarce holding to his sun-blackened shoulders, he contrived, somehow, with his voice and his eyes and his manner, to suggest a dim ghost of evening dress. . . . Just so men spoke and looked who wore costly raiment of finest black and white, who stood in stained and mullioned window embrasures lit with the late-setting English sun, and looked down upon terrace and terrace, lawn and lawn, statue and stone balustrade and sunk Italian garden—all the pomp and the beauty of the life that Scott had just glimpsed at as a boy, that

"Dence," who was not Dence, had lived and known—how long?

Some transfer of thought, touching the sensitive Celtic brain, made Scott point derisively to the tent and the log table and begin to repeat:

"The stately homes of England, how beautiful they stand!
Amid the tall ancestral trees . . ."

The explosion that followed struck him dumb.

"Lord! where did you learn to swear like that?" he said, when he had recovered his breath. "And, if I may ask, why? . . ."

"You may ask nothing," said the other, with flaming eyes. "That poem—that poem!" He nearly choked.

"I won't quote it again, if that's what you mean," said Scott, still puzzled. For only the Englishman or the Irishman, torn in two by half-caste Celt and Saxon blood, can know how those formal schoolroom lines of Campbell's stab, with a poisoned blade for every letter, the man who may see the "stately homes of England" never more.

Dence recovered himself instantly, and answered Scott's first question with as much ease as if nothing had occurred.

"Why, a man can scarcely spend all these years in Papuan mining camps without picking up a swear or two," he said.

"You don't swear like a miner," commented Scott. "You swear like a—like a—cavalry officer."

"Do I?" asked Dence mockingly. "You show an occasional gleam of intellect, certainly. Try turnin' it on to the reason why you couldn't count the boys, and see what you get."

"Don't get anything," said Scott. "I can only say what happened—or what I thought happened."

"Well, I'd advise you to stop talkin', then, and help me muster the boys."

They mustered the carriers: Anderson returned: the start was made.

"How many boys are there?" the leader jerked over his shoulder.

"Thirty-one," said Scott.

Anderson laughed.

"I'll remind you of the quinine when we camp to-night," he said.

But when it came to night, nobody was thinking of anything so commonplace as quinine. For the march had been an unusually light one, and they had gone quite a long way up Alligator Creek, leaving the deadly swamp miles behind, and, close to sunset, there had been a yell from one of the boys (who all knew by this time what their "Taubadas" were looking for), "Bokis, bokis!"

The native eyes, trained to the bush, had beaten the white man's sight. Yassi, a fur-headed small person clad in a red rag and a necklace of dog's teeth, had spied a hollow log lying jammed in a cleft

between two stones—a log that had evidently been shaped by steel tools—and was giving tongue to his discovery.

The three men precipitated themselves on the worn and weathered fragment of wood. It was a piece in the puzzle—a thread of the clue. . . . From what tree had the “box” been cut?

Cedar, evidently. Now cedars were not very common in the valley of the Iri: no one could remember having sighted more than one or two. It would not be difficult to locate the cedar that marked Cripps’ discovery—if they could find the creek.

“Yassi, you and Kobo come here,” said Anderson. Yassi and Kobo were the two boys formerly employed by Cripps, that Anderson had managed to find and engage. Heretofore they had been of no use in finding the way, for an East End Papuan, taken away from his own district, cannot remember a monotonous route through unbroken forest with any more success than might be expected from a “new chum” white. But now it was possible the two might be of service.

“How long you stop work along here, one time you come along Kippi (Cripps)?” asked Anderson.

A week or two, it seemed; after that, they had gone through the bush a long way, Yassi and Kobo could not say where. And by and by they had very little kai-kai left, so Kisi, the other white man, had

gone back to the Kikiramu, and a great many of the boys had gone too. But Yassi and Kobo had been kept, and some more, and they had gone with Kippi, and Kippi had found gold, but Yassi and Kobo did not know where, because the boys were not told to work it—Kippi made them stay in camp, and he worked it himself. And they liked that very much, because there was kai-kai enough since the other boys were gone, and they sit-lie-down and smoke all day. But by and by some bad fellow shoot Kippi, and he get sick, and he die, and all the boys plenty frighten, and they go back to the Kikiramu very quick. And they, Yassi and Kobo, had had nothing to do with killing the white man: they wanted the Taubadas to know that, for they were frightened when someone talked of Kippi; they feared the white men at the Kikiramu would be angry, but there was nothing bad they had done.

So much from Yassi and Kobo, their pidgin-English being translated. It was clear that they knew nothing of Cripps' great discovery, and clear, too, that they had been very shy of mentioning him at all, lest they should be implicated in his murder. Whether they deserved to be or not, Anderson considered an open question. One never knew with natives, he said, and doubtless the boys had been anxious to get home again. The Karivas might have done the job, or Yassi himself—impossible to say, and it didn't matter now.

The search went on.

Now, for the first time, the pleasure of the hunt took hold upon these three. Before, it had been merely a matter of travel, of a long fight against the daily, hourly, momentarily difficulties of the way: of a set task to be got through between every dawn and dusk, with sleep, delicious sleep, as payment at the end. There was nothing exciting in the adventures of the way: even Scott, new to the bush, felt this. The peril of the flooded gorge—the attack in the dark forest—the night among roaring alligators—these things stirred scarce a pulse of fear at the time, scarce a throb of interested recollection after they were over. Take a man into a powder factory once: he will go with strung-up courage and beating heart and talk of the adventure long after. Set him to work there eight hours a day, and in a week you will find him handling high explosives like so much corn out of a bin. . . .

So, in the pioneer lands, do men learn to confront danger and hardship, not with the excited pluck of over-civilised man, but with the cold emotionless courage that grows only in the soil of constant risk and death. They are wrong who call this bravery the pluck of the savage. No primitive race ever knew it. True, it is the strength of Antæus, regained from the ancient earth that bore him—but Antæus came back to the earth for the strengthening embrace, first having left it far and long. Who never leaves it, who never comes back, knows not this strength.

Thus it was into the midst of something like monot-

ony and boredom that the first scent of the hidden gold arose, like a breeze into a stifling forest track. In a morning all was changed. They left the upper waters of Alligator Creek and started to prospect the tributary streams leading into the great sweep of the Iri, with interest and excitement vividly renewed. For men may readily learn to look upon the face of death with indifference, but never upon the gleam of gold.

It is over now, years over, and they who took part in the chase, and in the strange happenings that followed and attended it, are, some of them, dead, some of them mewed in cities, some of them . . . I know not, nor does anyone know. It came and passed, one flying picture in the long cinematograph of time. Scott remembers it to-day, but he cannot tell you much of the time they spent in searching for the wonderful reef, because a man may recall a time of incident, happening by happening, but he cannot remember very clearly a time when sensations were events, and incidents took but second place. And in those days hope and fear, despair, delight, wonder, disappointment, speculation, seemed, in after recollection, to have sponged out the landscape and the marches, and the little happenings of every day, as the wreathing mists of afternoon blot out the green hills and blue ranges and serried forest crests of the Papuan mountain lands.

One day after another day they tramped up riverbeds, crossing the stream thirty and forty times be-

tween sunrise and sunset, cutting their way along the banks, climbing the walls of gorges, circling behind waterfalls, and all the time looking out for what they knew would be the sign of success in their long, long quest—the island in the midst of the water, with a great hollow tree upon it. Yassi and Kobo, at first relied on, proved afterwards to be of no use at all, for they were perfectly certain that each and every tributary of the Iri was the very one that Cripps had been prospecting when he found his gold. It seemed evident that he had been up at least five or six rivers, and that the boys had got hopelessly mixed in consequence. After a day or two, Anderson paid no attention to them, but made his own observations, and led the party as seemed best to himself.

Over and over again they would see something that looked like the island and the tree, and the man who saw it would call out, with dry throat, and the others would scramble hurriedly to his point of sight and look. But always it turned out to be an island with an ordinary tree on it, or a peninsula that looked like an island, or a sandbank that had caught a drifting snag, and held it aloft, wreathed with green lianas, to deceive the eager eyes of the wanderers. And after every one of these false alarms their hearts would sink, and they would say hopeful things to encourage each other, every man feeling hopeless himself.

The spectre of famine, that creeps close at the heels of every Papuan exploring party, now began

to dog their track. Flour was running low, meat was opened only every second day, and, worst of all, the tea was done. They had tobacco, but it was necessary to husband that, for tobacco is the coin of the Hinterland, and they hoped constantly to find some native village where they might purchase a little food. But it was becoming clear that the upper waters of the Iri were uninhabited, save for wandering predatory tribes like the Kariva. A beautiful, luxuriant, yet an utterly hungry land was this that they were travelling through.

Anderson began to press his party. The pace of the weakest member was necessarily the pace for all, but he had chosen his boys well, and they travelled under their lightened loads fast enough to give the half-seasoned Briton as much as he cared for, during the burning hours of climbing and splashing and scrambling up the endless tributaries of the Iri. Looking for a needle in a hayfield seemed to Scott a simple task compared with the chase they had undertaken in this primeval wilderness; but Anderson seemed to know what he was about, and had reasons for going up this river, and abandoning the other, that gave the hunt some air of purpose and direction.

It was a race now—a race with hunger and the powers of the wilderness. They must find the gold before the last loads were broken into, the last tins opened. Enough must be left to take the white men back to the Kikiramu: as for the boys, they could,

at a pinch, manage well enough on a few loads of native sago, gathered from the swamp on the way back.

The short allowance of food, the want of tea, and the small supply of tobacco, were felt by all the party, but no one complained. It was in the nature of things that one should suffer depression, weariness, unsatisfied cravings for many things on a prospecting or exploring trip. One gambled with one's power of enduring these pains against the hostile forces of Nature. Sometimes Nature won, sometimes man. It was the way of the explorer in Papua. These explorers did not mean to be beaten in the game.

"How far are we from the sago swamp?" asked Scott one weary evening when they were all lying on the platform of the fly, too tired to sit up, enjoying their tiny allowance of trade tobacco before going to sleep. It was very dark at the bottom of the forest sea: one could not tell whether there was a moon or not. The crowding tree-trunks dripped slow moisture from leaf and bole: the air smelt rank with decay.

You could see strange blossoms of flame in the darkness, where lily-shaped fungi grew on the fallen logs; and fire-flies, soaring and hovering, made green spangles against the black of the woven boughs.

"Not more than eight or nine miles, in a direct line," was Anderson's reply. "We've been making a track like a spider's web. That swamp's a nuisance, anyhow—it's in the direct road to the Ki-

kiramu, and if we get gold about here it'll make no end of trouble for the carriers going to the field."

"First catch your hare," quoted Dence.

"We'll catch it all right," affirmed the leader, with his pipe stuck in the corner of his mouth. There was something in his tone that gave the others confidence. They slept well that night.

Three ragged men, waving their arms and yelling, stood on the top of a peaked and battlemented precipice, against a sky of thunderous black. They would have been dancing, only for the fact that an ill-considered step might have danced them into eternity. They had to hold by trees in order to wave their hats and arms. They held on, and waved, and shouted, red in the face and sparkling-eyed. And the carriers, strung out along the crest of the precipice for a quarter of a mile behind, took up the cry and yelled in their turn, though they did not know what it was all about. But they had a shrewd idea that this yelling meant a halt and a rest by and by, and that was heaven to them.

Below the explorers a new reach of the river opened out. The stream they were following was one of the many unknown tributaries of the unmapped river Iri. Here the tributary widened, spreading out from the narrow gorge they had been following all the morning into an open shallow reach bordered by bush-covered slopes. The different greens of tree-fern and bush and vine, of palm

and banyan and huge New Guinea rubber trees, stood out in incredible brilliance against the thunderclouds behind. In the steely mirror of the open reach one plummy bouquet of glowing emerald rose up alone . . . an islet, with a streak of shadowy black across its heart.

"The island, the island—look at the trees!" howled Scott.

"Hooray!" cheered Dence, thumping Scott on the back.

"We're getting warm, boys—we'll be hot by and by!" roared Anderson, shaking the thick sweat-drops off his arms and face. They all spoke as if the party had been suddenly smitten with deafness, and there was not an inch of room in anyone's mind for amusement at Anderson's incongruous remark. The excitement of the hunt filled them to the brim. Almost, they sighted their game—for the gold had become a living thing to them now, after these weeks of famished chase. They felt that they were going to get something by the neck, and worry it—soon!

After the moment of ecstasy came plain prose for a while. The party had to be got down to the river, and that took time, as the precipice was almost bare of hand- or foot-hold, and bush ropes of liana had to be used. Then they were down on a muddy bank, and stumbling through the ooze towards the open space of steely-grey water. And then, regardless of possible alligators, they were all into the lagoon, down over their knees, splashing and stamping to-

wards the islet. The carriers stayed on the shore, squatting on their haunches, with their loads laid down, and watching the white men with dark, expressionless eyes. They were not in the least curious.

It was a small islet, but it stood high, and supported quite a number of trees, palms of different kinds for the most part, with trunks scaled and diamonded like snakes, or lifting slim white stems far into the sky, or standing up on the quaintest of tall wooden stilts. But one tree, a massive cottonwood, had a solid trunk like an oak, and that trunk was split by lightning from root to crown, leaving a wide dark hollow, deepened by time and weather into a chamber that would easily have sheltered two or three men. Beyond all doubt it was Cripps' tree—the tree of the great python. From this point, then, might be unwound the clue that led to riches—to the opening of all the doors of all the delights in all the world. . . .

It was midday now, but no one thought of lunch or rest. To unwind another turn of the clue, here, at once, was all that anyone desired. What next?

“ ‘A large boulder in the stream, showin' about three feet above water,’ ” quoted Dence. “There it is, as plain as the nose on Anderson's face. ‘When the river is very low a granite boulder is exposed for about eight inches’—well, the river is low, but not very, judgin' by the bank. Should think the granite boulder must be awash or underneath.”

“It's bound to be upstream, anyhow,” said An-

derson. "He was going up the river, and would naturally take his bearings the way he faced when going after the reef himself."

"What had we better do?" asked Scott, chafing at the little delay.

Anderson called up the boys, and set them to wade about in the river, feeling with their bare feet for submerged boulders. A curb of granite rewarded the search before long, just under water.

"Put a stone on it," ordered Anderson. "Now we can see our way. We have to get those two stones in line, and go west up the sidling."

"What's a sidling?" asked Scott.

"A ridge. That in front of us. If we go west, according to my compass, we'll strike gradually into the bush."

"Till we come to 'the sort of tree they made their box out of,' isn't it?"

"Yes. It's a good scheme, but I reckon I could have bettered it."

"Lucky for us Cripps slipped up a bit."

"He didn't, much. It was the chance of finding the python skin, and the luck of getting the original box, that helped us. Leave out chance, and we'd not have been here. Nelson said you must always leave something to chance, and it's a true saying—miners could tell you that."

They were edging into the bush now, led by the trembling needle of Anderson's compass. The juicy, rank-smelling underwood clung round their

knees, the thorn-studded vines caught at clothes and flesh. The two carriers who had been chosen to accompany them had to get out their great clearing knives and cut the way. Farther and farther from the river they crept, among the gnarled and buttressed trunks of the forest, under the swinging garlandry of air-plant, orchid, and bird's-nest fern. It was damp and dark here, and the cheerful talking of the river began to die away. A dozen times at least they saw the cedar tree in fancy before it came, but at last Scott sighted it plainly enough in a little clearing that it had made for itself by dint of starving out the feebler growths that struggled beneath its shade.

Under its boughs they stopped to mop their streaming faces and arms and consult the compass again.

“ ‘Thirty points north of east, two hundred and sixty paces,’ ” quoted Anderson. “We’re close on it now. That would take us pretty near back into the river again. Boys, we can’t miss it—that gold’s somewhere within three hundred yards of where we’re standing at this minute, unless Cripps was mad—and I don’t think he was, though most of us are, more or less.”

He set the course by the compass again, and they headed away at a slant from their former track, counting paces as they went in tones that gradually rose from a whisper to a shout. They smashed through vines, they tore away their bleeding arms

and hands from the myriad thorns of the bush, they flung themselves over logs, and took gullies at a flying leap. Behind them the carriers toiled, assuring each other that their masters had certainly been bitten by ghosts in the night, or had eaten roots bewitched by some mighty sorcerer.

"It is very good to lie under the roof of your house when the sun is high up, and chew betel-nut all day long," panted Yassi, in the Orokiva tongue, pulling his black shins out of a tangle of many-hooked "lawyer."

"Yes, we were mad to come with the white men again—what is a little trade stuff?" lamented Kobo. "Work was meant for women, not for men. Ow-wow, I wish I were back in my yam-garden, stirring up my wives with a stick when they do not dig quick enough!

"But I will make them work when I get back—I will make them work!" he added thoughtfully.

"Listen to that! The Taubadas are going madder than ever," commented Yassi, as a yell broke out ahead, followed by a sudden smashing and crashing through the low bushes.

"If they go altogether mad, we will hit them on the head with stone clubs when they are not looking, and then we will eat them, and then we will go back to the coast with all the goods, and tell the other white men they were killed by the Kariva. And then we will go home, and we shall be great men in our villages."

"Great men!" chanted the other Orokiva excitedly.

But at this point Scott and Dence came crashing back through the undergrowth, faces and eyes on fire.

"Go back!" they said, using the pidgin-English which is the lingua franca of Papua. "Altogether you fellow go back. No more you come up along us. You go along river where big tree stop; you go out island; you makem camp there."

"Scoot!" added Dence, in a tone that sent the carriers flying.

"The Taubadas are certainly mad," babbled Yassi, as they ran through the underbrush, not daring to look back.

"If one of you leaves the island, we'll shoot him!" came the voice of Scott, retreating in the distance. Silence fell on the forest, save for the scurrying noise of the carriers hurrying down to the river. They splashed through the shallows, reached the island, and flung themselves down in the shade. Not two o'clock, and halted for the day! Surely somebody's pet sorcerer was working well for him, far away in the delightful coast villages where pigs and cocoanuts flourished, and where a man might live a man's life, smoking and chewing idly under his pandanus thatch. . . .

Out in the forest, a quarter of a mile away, Dence was hugging Anderson round his brawny neck, and

swaying to and fro, while Scott sat on the ground and cried. The nervous temperament had got its own with him at last. But nothing any one of the three could have done at that moment would have astonished the others. They were past astonishment, past feeling of any kind save one. Had the woman who spoiled Anderson's life years before (you never heard of her, and never will), had the girl with the honey-brown eyes, who was loved by Dence and by Scott, to the sorrow of both, stepped suddenly into that theatrical-looking glade, among the palms and fern trees, hands outstretched and lips smiling for a kiss, it is long odds that not one of the men would have taken any particular notice of her. Had the brooding thunderstorm above them broken in a roar and a flash that shook the earth they stood on, and split the trees that were their shelter, nor Dence, nor Scott, nor Anderson would have moved an inch from where he stood. They had found the gold.

Running for thirty or forty feet through the scanty underbrush—here poor and feeble, because of the rocky soil—was a little rugged wall of something whitish—a hard, milky stone, stained here and there with dull red. It came up out of the ground edgeways, with a sharp cant to one side; rough grey granite overhung it, and bluish diorite underlay it, making it into a sort of mineral sandwich. The meat of the sandwich—the whitish quartz—was set thick with streaks and lumps of gold, ounces and pounds of it full in sight. Pieces that had broken off

the reef lay half buried in trailing green, showing gold in their fractures and edges. One, near as big as a bucket, was studded all over with yellow lumps, as a school-feast pudding is studded with blocks of suet.

"My God in heaven! look at that!" exclaimed Anderson, breaking loose from the polar-bear hug of Dence to put his hands about the lump and heave it from the ground. "There's three hundred ounces in it if there's a single weight."

"Gold!" sobbed Scott, with heaving chest. "Gold!" He got up, the tears running unshamedly down his cheeks, and began picking at the reef with his nails. Dence was patting and petting it as if it had been a favourite horse, swearing strange cavalry oaths as he did so. In a minute he straightened himself up and turned to Anderson, who had just let go his gold-studded boulder. By a simultaneous impulse, all three men seized each other's hands, and began swaying about together, shaking and gripping one another's dirty fingers, and uttering half-articulate cries of delight.

"Three cheers!" cried Dence at last. They gave them, and three more to follow, and three more after that, till the arches of the forest rang as they had not rung since creation's dawn. And then, being suddenly very tired out indeed, the adventurers sat down upon the reef and looked at one another's marvellously altered faces.

It felt—how did it feel? As if a window had

suddenly slipped down and shut out the noise and rush of a hurrying midday thoroughfare, leaving, instead, a silence almost bewildering. As if one had been rushing across a continent in an express train, engine screaming, dust flying, landscape quivering past—and in a moment found oneself standing still, on a quiet little country platform, with the sunshine sleeping on the empty rails, and the far-off throb of the train dying away in the distance. . . . The struggle, the chase, the fight with time and space and peril and hunger were done. And to the three hungry, weary, overworked, and excited men the sudden blank was staggering.

"I can't believe it, somehow," said Scott, with a rather weak laugh, absently fingering the wonderful reef.

"Nor I; but it's true," said Anderson, his eyes fixing themselves on the bucket-shaped fragment, with its glittering incrustations, as if they could never detach themselves again. "Dence, I can't keep my hands off this much longer. Suppose we send back to the camp and fetch our picks and some tucker, and get all we can out of this show before dark?"

"Righto," assented Dence. "I'm aching to be at it. Who'll go?"

"I don't mind," said Scott, who felt as though he needed a little sobering. "We don't want the boys here at present, I suppose."

"You suppose right," answered Anderson em-

phatically. "They're not needed to work this sort of thing, and the less they know the better."

"I thought so when you sent us back to stop them as soon as you caught sight of the reef."

"Hurry, hurry!" urged Dence, who was fidgeting about the reef, picking away with a penknife. Anderson had already got hold of a sharp fragment of stone and knocked a bit of gold out.

"Yes, hurry!" he added, hitting away with his improvised hammer.

They had had a tiring and exciting half-day, and every one of the three was more or less weak for want of proper food. The heat, as the day wore on, became appalling, down in this airless glade, shut off from every breath of river air, and canopied by thickly gathering thunderclouds. Yet they worked that afternoon as if the Last Day were upon them, and salvation purchasable by the gold they should win before the dark came down. They tore and smashed at the rock with their picks, and clawed it with their hands. They put the broken fragments in an iron camp oven, and beat them still smaller, and picked the gold out of them in flakes and lumps and pieces. They pooled their gains in a quart billy-can, and saw the gold cover the bottom, and begin to climb up the sides, before the four o'clock storm broke upon their heads. And in the middle of the storm they went on, swinging their picks under a ceaseless crackle and roar of bellowing flame that

lit up the dripping caves of the forest with blue lights like signal-flares, and turned the rain to streaming glass, and showed the lines of weariness on the three tired faces, as they passed continually, in the alternating leap of the flashes, from glare to gloom. . . . That night, in the camp by the river, white men and black slept as sound as Cripps himself, lying in his unknown bed beneath the sodden earth and leaves of the "untrampled forest floor." There was no sentry set, and no one waked, so the little point of flame that rose and brightened and died away, a long way off down the river, was seen by none.

CHAPTER X

MR. RUPERT DENCE was thinking.

Two days had passed since the finding of the reef, and almost two nights. It was the second night now—still and blue and moonlit, the river black glass in the shadows, silver glass in the light; the forest indigo and moss-agate green beneath the pouring flood of the wonderful tropic moon. She was past the full to-night, and so rose late. The camp by the river had been long asleep when Rupert Dence stirred on the rough sacking of his bed, stretched, sighed, awoke, and looked out from under the fly upon a slumbering world.

There is no man or woman but knows that three o'clock waking, when the little nibbling care that has lain drugged by labour throughout the day, and by weariness through the early night, stirs to life again, and sets its teeth at work. "Sleep no more!" it cries, like the voice that grieved Macbeth. "Sleep no more—I have been waiting for the moment when your tired body should rise for a moment like a corpse through the drowning sea of sleep, and I have set my fangs into it, to make sure that it shall not sink again. Wake, and listen, and feel!"

Rupert Dence had been haunted by just such a little rat-like care, ever since the day in the forest

when they had met with the invisible Kariva bowmen. Something had happened that day which puzzled him. Something more had happened on the day when Scott failed to count the carriers right. And only a few hours before a third thing had happened—he thought.

He was not sure—that was the worst of it. When a man is constantly tobacco-hungry he imagines the smell and taste of tobacco, at times, where it does not exist. Dence, like all New Guinea miners, was a heavy smoker, and the daily reduction of his allowance irked him not a little. That evening, when the sunset wind was blowing up the river, he had been washing himself in the stream, and he really did think that the faintest possible whiff of “navy cut” not stick, which was all the expedition carried—had been blown for an instant to his hungry nostrils.

If it had been? If they had allowed the hunt and the finding of the reef to blind them to things they should have remembered . . .

The madness of gold was upon them; they could think and speak of nothing else. All that day, from sunrise to dark, they had been labouring desperately at the reef, tearing from it its shining treasure, hardly believing their eyes as they saw the richness of what they had got, yet talking constantly of the untouched millions that might lie buried in the earth below. Before those millions the hundred that they were garnering with their picks from the exposed outcrop

seemed almost poor. Anderson calculated, at the end of the day, that they had won about four hundred and fifty among the three, and nobody thought it nearly enough.

For all that, they were wild with the excitement of the work; not one of them went back to the camp for food or rest during all the long, hot day. They hacked open a couple of tins, and bolted the contents from plates of ship's biscuit, drinking out of the bucket of water they had brought from the river in the morning, and feeding themselves from hands covered with clinging dirt, and curiously spangled about the nails with gold. They talked gold all day. They told each other what had been got in Westralia in the early times of the rush; they spoke of the cruel Klondyke; they went back to tales of Ballarat and Bendigo, and the era of the "Forty-Nine." They threw bitter contempt upon the moderate gains of old Papuan fields, Yodda and Lakakamu and Kikiramu, and sneered at the Woodlark Reef, which you had to go after four hundred feet underground, and which didn't work out more than an ounce or so to the ton when you got it. Now and then one of the three would break off into an account of what he meant to do with his share, but that part seemed far off and unreal, and did not really interest anyone very much in these first hours of furious gold-getting. The royal metal seemed aim and end in itself.

So they worked, and went home, and slept. And so Dence woke up, late in the night, with the little

rat of anxiety gnawing away in his mind, and demanding to be noticed.

Was there anyone else on the river?

Most unlikely—well-nigh impossible. . . . Yet—was not Papua the Country of the Impossible?

Rupert Dence sat up on his bunk in the moonlight, his eyes looking down the river, his chin set on his knees—and found no answer to his thoughts.

Anderson and Scott, rising at the dawn of day and making haste to get breakfast over, so that they might begin their work again as soon as possible, found the third partner disinclined to get up. Dence was in one of his nasty moods. He was not sick, he said; he was simply tired and sleepy, and he meant to stop where he was. When they tried to punch him into getting up and taking his share of work, he swore at them elaborately, and wrapped his head in his blanket, out of which proceeded, afterwards, certain muffled sounds, having reference to the folly of losing your night's sleep under any circumstances, especially when it did no adjectived persons any adjectived good, and brought you no adjectived thanks.

"Let him alone," advised Anderson. "Dence is a queer fish, and won't stand being interfered with. There isn't any terrible hurry."

It was pleasant walking through the bush to the reef again, in the cool of early morning, pink and lilac orchid flowers smelling sweet on the branches of the great dusk trees, bell-birds tank-tanking, and

Gaura pigeons ringing golden chimes. The two men spoke little. They were filled with quiet, dreamy happiness, the calm of feeling that follows on the storm, whether of joy or grief. They saw before them long years of luxury and ease that they had bought with toil and danger unspeakable. They felt the weight of common human anxieties lifted away for ever from their hearts—those anxieties that are carried all through life by almost every man; fear for the “rainy day,” fear for the grey, cold years when the grasshopper shall be a burden, fear for the vulnerable body so easily hurt or crippled, and fear of the bitter bread that broken men must eat. There were no such fears for them. The little white curb of quartz, with its yellow spots and streakings, was high enough to wall them off for ever.

They walked into the clearing that they had made about the reef.

Astride the curb of quartz sat Clay of Samarai, his pasty face terrible with fear and twitching with evil triumph. He had a loaded revolver in each hand. A bunch of native carriers squatted on the ground behind him. Some few yards from where he sat, the morning sun rays shot through the trees straight upon a new-cut wooden post hammered into the ground, and bearing a paper, on which some words were written in blotted ink.

Scott stopped dead on the verge of the clearing, dumfounded. He could not believe he saw rightly. And what the mischief . . .

He caught the expression on Anderson's face, and it struck him like a blow. The miner had turned a horrible white, and his greenish eyes had dilated till they looked nearly black.

"Good God in Heaven!" he choked. "The little devil's jumped our claim!"

"I don't understand," said Scott, with a feeling of cold fright creeping up his back. "What has he done? What business has he here? Kick him out!"

"I can't," said Anderson, still in that low, choked voice.

"You can't! You can't!" crowed Clay, like a rooster with the croup. He was terribly frightened, and the revolvers swayed in his grip. "You never pegged your claim. I've a perfect right. The Government will support me. My boys are witnesses—I pegged out the claim first, early this morning—read the notice. It's all in order. I—I—I'll shoot any man who touches it."

He laughed the high whinnying laugh of abject fear. But it was not the fear of the creature that was so disgusting to see; it was his dreadful courage—the courage of a starveling dog over a stolen bone. The bone is life to him—if its loss were death to you, or a thousand of you, he would keep his teeth in it just the same.

"Finding's keeping!" he whinnied. "Don't you dare touch me. You'll hang if you do. This—this isn't your old Crown Colony days. We've got a

Government of our own. You'll be hanged, I tell you."

There seemed to be something in Anderson's face that induced him to harp on the question, for he called out yet once again that they hanged you in Papua nowadays, before he fell silent, looking at the two miners, and trying to keep his chin from jerking up and down.

"The question is," said Anderson, speaking quite quietly, "whether it isn't worth hanging—for you."

"I'll shoot you," babbled Clay.

"I've seen men strung up—for much less," stated Anderson. "In Venezuela. And other places." He seemed to be communing with himself, and making up his mind—under the wobbling barrels of the two revolvers. Scott clinched his teeth as the gleam of the trembling steel crossed his own face; he could see that Clay was scarcely responsible for his actions at the moment, and he wished himself well out of the range of those threatening muzzles. But one could not move away, while Anderson stood looking right into the clump of lead-nosed barrels, coolly deciding what he should do.

There was always a chance of surprise from stalking Karivas in these unknown regions, and the three adventurers had fallen into the habit of wearing their own revolvers all day long. Anderson's swung loose on his hip in an open holster, and Scott saw his fingers stealing round to it, while Clay, half blind with fright, kept babbling and exulting, and waving

his weapon in the air. . . . The big miner's face had changed—was changing . . .

"No, by God, you don't!"

Scott never knew whether he said the words, or merely thought them. But he had Anderson by the arm in an instant, and with all the strength of his shipyard-toughened muscles was tugging him back into the bush. Before you could have called out, they were struggling and scrapping confusedly through the undergrowth, one hauling, the other resisting—a wrestling bout that meant life or death to Clay.

Clay had sense enough to see that, and, still clutching his revolvers, but forgetting that he held them, fled into the forest. And the two partners fought, among the thorny citron bushes, and the tangled lianas, and the spindling, long-branched gum trees—smashing, tripping, and shouting out.

"Quit it, Anderson, ye fool!" gasped the Belfast-man. "Quit, I tell ye! I'm not going to stand by and see ye commit murder."

"You'll feel me commit it, if you don't let me go!" roared the other. "Do you know what he's done? LET GO!"

"I will," said Scott suddenly, releasing his hold. He had seen Clay disappear in the bush.

Anderson glared round him like a tiger robbed of its prey.

"Where's he gone?" he demanded.

"Now, you don't suppose I'm going to tell you

that. Can't you keep your hair on for a minute, and tell me what's happened?" Scott was fastening up his shirt, torn nearly off his back. He seemed much the cooler of the two, but in reality a horrid fear was thumping at his heart. What must the injury be that had so transformed the iron-natured Anderson?

"Happened?" said Anderson, breathing quickly, and catching hold of a tree-fern trunk, as though he needed its support. "He has taken the reef from us. That's all."

"How?" asked Scott, with dry lips. This was very bad.

"Pegged out a claim—all over the outcrop. I didn't need to look at the notice—it was the one thing he would do. It's his—by mining law, and Commonwealth law."

"Why didn't we peg out our claim?"

Anderson groaned.

"Why didn't we? Because Dence and I were two of the wretchedest fools that ever . . . But there wasn't a white man within a week's march.—How could one—— Scott, we've been bad mates to you. We've ruined you."

"Oh, that's all rot; if you can stand it, I can. Of course, I didn't know——"

"No—and we didn't think. . . . The little devil's been at the Kikiramu all the time. That cook must have been him. He must have got Carter to grub-stake him, with some plausible tale or other, and

followed us up almost as soon as we started. A child could have traced us by our track. And there were his boys making sago in the same swamp as ours—the day one of them got into our crowd, and you counted thirty-two. . . . Why didn't we see?" he groaned.

They had both quieted down now. They were beginning to realise what it meant. The golden dream was gone. There would be no triumphal voyage down to Sydney in the best cabins of the B.P. liners—the gates of all the delights in all the world opening wide before them as they went—no magic raft to float them up above the struggles and miseries of a drowning, moneyless humanity—no latter end secure from the fear of dependence, that haunts a brave man worse than the fear of death. They would be—like other people. Nothing more.

Slowly, as beasts that have received a deadly wound, they crawled home. The camp was as they left it; the natives had not finished their billy-can of rice they were beginning when the two had started out. Dence, coiled in his bunk, still slept.

The Australian and the Irishman sat down upon the ground and looked at the carriers wolfing their food. A flight of hornbills, dark green bodied, orange necked, crossed the river. A wild pig, far away in the forest, crashed among the trees. It was very quiet; you could hear the insects crawling in the bush and the dead leaves dropping in the stream.

They had not the heart to speak.

Presently Dence took his head from under his arm, untwisted his legs, and woke up.

"I've had a good sleep," he remarked, turning out of his bunk. "Did you fellows eat all the kai-kai? I could manage half a pig, if we had one."

"Dence," said Anderson, sitting on the ground, "there's only one damned fool to match you in the world, and that's me."

"But why?" queried Dence, pulling on his boots. "No use looking so down in the mouth about it, anyhow, if you have found out the truth once in a way."

"I'm not having the loan of you," said Anderson. "I'm serious. Clay has sneaked after us and pegged out our claim."

Mr. Dence finished pulling on his boot without any comment. He looked under the bunk for the other, pulled that on too, and then came out from under the fly, hair on end, and shirt open over his chest. He looked at Anderson with a quizzical eye.

"You are a funny devil, you know," he said.

"Hang you, we're not making fun!" shouted Scott. "It's true. Go and look at the peg he's put up, if you don't believe it." He was feeling very sore indeed against the two for their neglect in pegging out the claims—though he knew that not one in a thousand would have done so, in such a place as this—and the effort to keep back any reproach made him vicious.

Dence, being out of the tent, looked deliberately

round him for a tree with a good, steady trunk. Having found one, he leaned up against it, shut his eyes, opened his mouth, and laughed till he nearly choked.

"I never—never—knew—such a good one," he panted. "Oh, to see your faces——" He was off again. "Stop me, Anderson, I'll shake my ribs loose. Oh—I can't breathe. Oh, by Jove, it's too rich." He yelled louder.

Scott stared in utter bewilderment, tinged with annoyance. But Anderson's eyes were beginning to glitter, and the colour was coming back to his face. He got up, looked at Dence, saw his laughter fit was not likely to come to an immediate end, and deliberately emptied a bucket of water over the laugh-er's head.

"Confound you, what did you do that for?" spluttered Dence, all the laugh washed out of him.

"I reckoned it was the best way to treat hysterics," said Anderson dryly. "Out with it. What have you done?"

"Got up in the middle of the night and pegged out three claims, one for each of us—75 by 400 apiece. We'll see to the extra reward claim tomorrow. (Where's there a towel? You've half drowned me!) Put the four pegs in all right and stuck up the notice. Took—— Here, you needn't pound my ribs off my backbone—who's got hysterics now?"

"Good for you! Good old man!" Anderson was

exclaiming, to the accompaniment of hearty slaps upon Dence's back. Scott had leaped to his feet with a spring like a wallaby, and was pumping the Englishman's arm up and down, using, in his excitement, expressions that would certainly not have passed muster in the Young Men's Christian Association.

"Unhand me, sir!" commanded Dence loftily. "My Lord, I conjure you let me pass—I would go and clean myself in the river."

"No, you don't," Anderson assured him. "We want to hear some more."

"There isn't any more. I dated it, and took Yassi and Kobo with me to see what I did, by the struggling moonbeams' misty light, and the lantern dimly burnin'. Then I went back, and lay like a warrior takin' his rest, till you two came back. . . . And Clay got up very early, did he, the little bird, and went out to catch the early worm? And why didn't the little bird see that the bloomin' little worm was caught already?"

"Oh, that's plain," said Anderson, who now looked ten years younger than he had done a few minutes earlier. "He was afraid to take up time marking out the proper square, so he put in a datum peg——"

"What's that?" asked Scott.

"What you saw. A peg put up to claim a certain area—75 by 400 is the limit—in the two directions mentioned on the notice. It's as good as the other—if it gets there first. Of course, he had to

take up a smaller area, so he never saw Dence's pegs at all—they must have been out of sight in the bush."

"Then we're really all right, after all?"

"You bet."

"Three cheers for Dence!" yelled Scott, throwing up his hat.

They gave them, and another to follow, Dence very obligingly joining in himself, because, as he explained, the cheer would have been spoiled if he hadn't. Clay, skulking about in the bush, as near as he dared, heard the cheering, and felt his heart sink with fear. Why should ruined men cheer?

He found out before very long, when the ruined men, quartering the bush among them with scientific precision, started out to run him down. He heard them coming, and made widely for the river, hoping to reach the canoe he had left tied up under a log in time to get away. But his boys, who liked their master not at all, and considered the hunt an excellent joke, frustrated his efforts by getting in his way at every opportunity, so that the chase was short and disastrous—for the quarry. In less than ten minutes Clay was struggling and howling in the grip of Dence, while Anderson and Scott, roaring with laughter, tied his hands and feet with "bush ropes" and slung him on a pole, after the fashion of cannibal Papua preparing for a feast. His own boys, at the order of the miners, took him very readily upon their shoulders, and carried him through the bush

to the camp by the river. The miners followed, still laughing; Clay filled the bush with terrified cries and entreaties and threats of Government vengeance; the native carriers, uplifted and excited, sang a war-song as they went. And above all the noise made by the strange procession, rose the frantic screeching of the great white cockatoos that lived on the cliffs above the river; for your cockatoo is the natural sentry of the wilds, and gives ample tongue to his suspicions at the least suggestion of trouble.

Before they reached the camp, they carried their prisoner round by the reef, and showed him every one of Dence's pegs, bumping his head soundly on each, to impress it upon his memory.

"The Government will protect us," they told him. "You'll be hanged if you look crooked at us. There's law and order in the country nowadays."

They carried him down to the river-bank, and deposited him, none too carefully, on the ground. His doughy face was green with fright, and he kept crying on them, in God's name, for Christ's sake, to let him go.

"Hear the brute!" said Anderson disgustedly, spitting into the river. "He's enough to make any one turn atheist."

"Do you think," said Dence, with a sidewise wink, "that it would be better to drop him into the river just as he is, or give him to the boys to play with? We've a few young devils of Orokivas who would enjoy a little fun."

At this, Clay began to fight wildly against the restraining ropes. Kobo, who was a fine, upstanding, well-mannered boy, came forward eagerly, his eyes glowing, and pulled the lianas tighter.

"Taubada," he said, with an ingratiating smile, "more better you give him along we-fellow Orokiva boy. All the time we-fellow no got betel-nut, no got dance, no got fight, no got nothings, makem play belong Orokiva. All the time belly be long we-fellow all same one big stone he stop along him. Suppose you giving bad-fellow white man, Orokiva boy he plenty like."

"What will you do with him?" asked Anderson gravely.

"By n' by we breakem leg belong him, takem one stick-fire, put him along eye," said the Orokiva, with a delightful smile. "Behind, he stop one day, two day, we look along him, no can run away, plenty we talk along him, make sing, make dance. By n' by makem plenty big pyre, puttem that fellow along pyre, he cook all same pig, all same dish. Plenty he sing out, altogether grease belong him he fell down along fire. Very good, my word! Taubada, you like?"

It seemed to the Orokiva that his employers were showing signs of a more liberal-minded sporting disposition than he had believed them to possess, and he was ready at once to meet them on their own ground. A New Guinea savage is not really surprised.

But Scott had had as much as he wanted, for Clay was beginning to howl.

"Shut up, you silly brute!" he said loudly. "They're only taking a rise out of you. No one's going to hurt you. Go on, you bushman, and clean the billy-cans," he added, throwing at the Orokiva the epithet that for some incomprehensible reason grieves and reduces to submission almost any native of New Guinea.

"Me no bushman!" protested the warrior, in a mortified tone, slinking away to his scullion-work.

"Well, since Scott has given the show away, there's no use keepin' it up any longer," remarked Dence. "Anderson, I vote we make this thing useful, as we'll have to keep it here for a good bit. It can cook, it seems, so we'll make it cook and general orderly, and pay it wages, so that it can't say it hasn't had a fair deal."

"Right," said Anderson, slashing through the ropes with his knife.

It was arranged later in the day that Scott, as the least experienced miner, should go back in a short time to the Kikiramu field to place the applications with the warden, and fetch up a fresh supply of food, taking a number of carriers with him. For the present, and until the miners thought well to release him, Clay was to look upon himself as a prisoner. There was no fear of his running away, since he could not get back to civilisation without carriers or stores.

In the evening the three mates sat on a log near

the river smoking, beating off the mosquitoes, and talking. Clay's tent had been put up within sight of the others, but he was given to understand that his company was not desired in the white men's camp, so, like Achilles, he skulked apart.

"It was the oddest thing to see him defy us," said Scott, relating the incidents of the morning yet again.

"It gave one quite a turn, just as if a sheep had made for you and bitten you. Seemed sort of unnatural."

"Nothing's unnatural," said Dence.

"Well, what was that?"

"Perfectly natural. Anything that has life will fight, if its motive is strong enough. I happen to know Clay's motive."

"Oh, the gold."

"Not quite—or not only. What's the next strongest passion in the world?"

"You don't mean to say that thing's got a girl?"

"I don't. That's the trouble."

"How?" asked Scott, puzzled and interested. He felt at times that Dence went a good deal beyond him. Clay, to his vision, was a mere human rat—how could a rat have any motive or feeling save the rat-like one of greediness?

"Did you ever think," asked Dence, smoking slowly, "you and Anderson, what it would be like if no woman cared for you—ever had, or ever could?"

Two right hands went up to two moustaches and twisted them a little knowingly. Anderson only

smiled. You could see he thought of many things. Scott answered quickly.

"No, by Jove, I did not—but it would be—well, it would be——"

He wished very much that somebody were here to boast for him. Though a modest man enough, Scott was not blind to the fact that Janie, and the girl with the sweet brown eyes, were—what could one say?—well, scarcely singular in their tastes.

"Just so," said Dence. "Well, there are men, not very many of them, but some, who have never been liked by anything that wore a skirt. Clay's one. Any woman on earth would fancy a humpback sooner than him—fancy a blind nigger—fancy Satan himself. Why? You ask women; they might tell you—I couldn't, for I don't know, but there it is. He isn't exactly an ugly fellow, in a way: he's as big and strong as the average; if he lies and sneaks, so do thousands who are liked by women whose shoes they aren't fit to tie. But—women won't count him in the game. Never did. Never will. I've known Clay a good while, and I know that's true.

"Well," he went on, "it's pretty well poisoned his life, and—naturally—made him hate men who are liked by women. And he dreams of turnin' the tables, somehow or other, some day. He dreams of being rich, so that he can buy a handsome wife, as any rich man can—just as you buy a horse at a fair, and put a halter on it, and tie it in your stable. And he fancies how he'd be seen drivin' in motor-cars with

famous actresses and singers, who wouldn't go out to lunch with the handsomest man he knows, unless they got somethin' out of it—he reckons he'd have diamonds enough handy to make them play they liked him, anyhow. And he'd flash his money about to such an extent that the girls who like all the other men he knows, and who have given him the ugly set-down, would just come crawlin' round. Oh, some of his notions are not so far out—for a little rat with a rat's brain. And, if you want to know, that's why Clay has done—what he has."

"I don't see how you know," commented Scott, a little acidly. The subject Dence had started held certain drops of bitterness somewhere—for that company.

"I know," said the man who had lived too much, and, as he sometimes told himself, too long. "There are keys that unlock most doors. . . . Deuce of it is, they cost such a lot, that by the time you've got the bunch, you're pretty well bankrupt."

"Well, I'm for bed," said Scott, stifling a yawn.

CHAPTER XI

THEY were taking round the eleven o'clock tea in Samarai.

Only in the Land-of-Lots-of-Time does eleven o'clock tea really flourish. In England, it sulks ashamed about back drawing-rooms and housemaids' pantries, cherished as a secret vice by the women of the house, and contemned by the men. It lifts its head to the status of a tolerated luxury in Australia, where the station owner and his hardy sons are not ashamed to sit down on the verandah with wife and sisters and temper the heat of the morning with a refreshing cup or two before they set foot in stirrup again. And in Australia's outback colony, Papua, it finds its own at last. For here eleven o'clock tea is actually an institution of the country, recognised by Government.

It was eleven, and a beautiful, molten-gold-hot morning. Up and down the little white coral pathways, between the ranks of scarlet crotons, and under the shadow of the tossing palms, trotted the Government boys, brown-legged, blue-tunicked, bearing jugs and plates to the Government offices. On all the verandahs of the bungalows and hotels spoons tinkled and china clinked. Men who did not drink tea, because their tastes were for stronger stuff,

drifted into the bars of Figg's Federal, and Bunn's, driven irresistibly by the universal thirst, and there comforted themselves with beer.

Charmian Ducane was kept busy serving, for the town was full at present, and the morning was unusually warm. Her little soft hands, once white, but reddened now by the constant washing and wiping of glasses, were hard at work drawing and handing drink, taking money, giving change, and marking down scores. She had found the calculating part almost impossible at first; even yet she depended a good deal on a paper and pencil, and more on the kindness of the men who frequented the bar, and who were always ready to help her out with a sum, or to protect her against taking bad money. She had taken a good deal at first, especially on steamer days. Figg had scolded her, and she had cried so much about it that her eyes were very red. Then a couple of Yodda miners had asked her what the matter was, and she had told them. After that the word had gone round in Samarai that anyone who was caught giving her bad money would suffer for it. Thenceforward pewter florins and composition sovereigns came no more to the Federal till.

Figg, however, was dissatisfied. He had engaged the heroine of the Ducane trial with certain expectations which had not been fulfilled. He had never supposed she would make a smart barmaid, but he did anticipate that her notoriety would draw all Samarai to his hotel, out of sheer curiosity. It

did, for a fortnight—no more. In the tiny island town, with its stationary population, everybody had done all the staring that curiosity demanded, very soon, and there was nothing to keep up interest, once the nine days' wonder had subsided.

And Mrs. Ducane was not a good barmaid.

Anyone could see that she hated the work, and felt degraded by it. She tried to be pleasant to everybody, for Charmian was an honest soul (else had she paid back Ducane in his own base coin, years and years ago), and she knew that her smiles were considered in her salary. So she wore a galvanised little grin that was the most piteous thing about her piteous position, and she did not slap the customers in the face, as she really wished to do, when they squeezed her fingers as she was handing glasses. But she could not manage to look as if she liked her work or her patrons, and, what with the fear of being too civil, and the fear of not being civil enough, she always seemed half scared—more and more to the annoyance of landlord Figg, who began to think that charity was too expensive a luxury for the Federal Hotel.

This day, however, she was brighter than usual, and even talked to the men she was serving with something like the old gaiety of manner that had made Mrs. Ducane's at-home days the most popular in North Queensland—once upon a time. The wave of take-it-easiness that floods all Samarai about the coming of the eleven o'clock hour had settled

down upon Figg's; the boarders who had something to do had slipped away from doing it, to lounge and loaf away a quarter of an hour in Charmian's bar. The boarders who had nothing to do (and they were many) were lying about the seats on the verandah, where they had lain since breakfast, drifting in and out of the bar now and then, and all the time exchanging sleepy gossip with the people who came in from the streets and stores.

More than usual this morning Charmian disliked it all—the smell of liquor, the reek of tobacco, the heat and the dry rattle of the palms, and the glare from the fierce blue sea outside. Yet she felt better able to stand it than usual, for she had a letter in her pocket, crackling every time she moved, that had put new light in the golden brown of her eyes, and had caused her, for no reason except a general uplifting of heart, to put on her very best muslin dress. Who shall separate cause and effect in the tangle of gratified emotion that induces, and accompanies, the wearing of a pretty woman's prettiest dress? Charmian felt twenty per cent. happier than usual when she got the letter, and ten per cent. happier still when she had preened her feathers to celebrate its coming. In spite of the ill-smelling bar, and the glaring light, and the rude talk of the men about her, life looked pleasant this morning. Scott's letter, hidden away in her pocket, where she could feel it crumple as she moved, shed its own glamour upon the bar, and the town, and the island—even upon the world.

beyond, that had been so cruel to little Charmian. After all, her trouble had rid her of Grant Ducane; was not that one glorious fact compensation enough for anything?

She wiped glasses industriously, tripping about the bar with a lighter foot than usual, and singing softly as she moved. The hot sea creamed hissing on the scorching sand, at the other side of the road the palm-vanes struck their huge dry hands together with a sound like rain. From the verandah one could hear the steady stream of talk that flowed among the lounges and long chairs—news from the pearly islands a day to eastward; chatter about Kikiramu goldfield news, just brought down by the coasting steamer; ship talk of every kind—when the Government yacht was due, what had happened to So-and-so's schooner; whether the German boat would call on her upward trip . . .

"Not she; the North German Lloyd never calls without she's got forty pounds' worth of passenger to fetch at the least, and there's no one due from here to Singapore. She won't call," maintained a fat trader in a worn suit of khaki.

"What's the next boat in from south, then?" asked some invisible person.

"*Matunga's* due in three days," they babbled on.

Charmian felt half asleep as she stirred about her bar, drawing beer for a couple of men who had come in, and listening dully to the interminable shipping

talk. It did not interest her at all. How stupefying the smell of beer was!

Of a sudden a howl arose from the natives on the beach—"Say-O! Say-O!"

"Sail-O!" shouted the men on the verandah, everyone jumping to his feet. In the direction of China Straits the imperial blue of the morning sky was stained by a thin smear of trailing black.

"It is the German boat!" triumphed the man who had been arguing with the trader. "Nothing else could make such a smoke. Never calls going up, doesn't she?"

"She must have passengers to land—a good lot of them," maintained the trader. He was really mortified, for they take the doings of ships mighty seriously in Samarai, and the trade of marine prophet—in the absence of telegraphy, wireless or wired—carries some repute.

But when the great yellow-funnelled Norddeutscher Lloyd had come to anchor in the Straits before the town, looking absurdly big there, as she towered up among the schooners and luggers and oil-launches, it became plain that she had not come to land passengers—at least, of the ordinary kind. The doctor was signalled for, and went out as usual; he remained a good while on board, and when he came ashore, it was only to tell his hospital assistant that a bed would be wanted for an accident at once, and to oversee the preparing of a stretcher. Then he went on board the steamer again, and helped to

lower a sick man into his own whaleboat. A passenger on the ship had fallen down a hatchway, and had been so badly injured that the ship's doctor refused to subject him to the chances of wind and weather for the rest of the run to Singapore. As Samarai had a doctor and a hospital, he must be landed there. So ordained the Herr Doktor, and so it was done.

Therefore the German boat called, and therefore she got away again as quickly as she could, having landed her accident case. All Samarai was in a flutter of excitement; they are habitually on short commons as regards happenings of interest in the island town (save for murders in the interior, cases of cannibalism reported from the islands, and other everyday incidents about which nobody cares). The doctor was fairly besieged on his usual rounds that afternoon. Who was the man? What was the matter with him? Where had he been going? Was he going to recover? How would he get away again? And a hundred questions more followed the busy official as he went up and down the park-like walks of the island, from Bob of Woodlark, the latest miner to blow off his right arm fishing illegally with dynamite, to Blank of Ioma, brought in a week ago with blackwater fever; from Mrs. Q. and her baby, to young R. the magistrate and his "New Guinea sore leg."

The man, according to the doctor, was no less a person than Kenton, lately of Lemba Plantation—a

man who had made money in Papua, and gone away to enjoy it, travelling about the world. He had smashed a leg, and several ribs, and the lung was perforated. He had been on his way to England, via the Malay States. He was certainly going to recover, now that he was off a rolling ship, but he wasn't to be visited. He would get away again when it pleased Providence and Dr. Cornwall. (The doctor was young, new, and a locum tenens; which is as much as to say that he took a dignified and solemn, not to say sacred, view of his responsibilities of office.)

It happened that evening that Dr. Cornwall, being kept rather long at Figg's Federal Hotel in attendance on a sick trader, thought well to dine there, instead of climbing up to his own Governmental residence on the top of the island. It happened also that the doctor, who advocated teetotalism in hot climates, but did not practise it, turned into the bar after dinner and refreshed himself with a glass—or two, or three—of Figg's excellent whiskey. And it also happened that he talked, perhaps rather more than a doctor should.

He discoursed, with excellent learning, on the state of his patient's injured limbs and organs, and on the natural processes that would assist his own healing efforts. He was patronising about Lister, and mentioned "old Ambrose Paré" with kindness. He said that Frederick Treves was a good fellow if people only wouldn't spoil him, and observed that

he personally never had. He went off at a tangent into the oath of Hippocrates, and remarked in the same breath that Kenton's evidently intemperate habits wouldn't improve his chances of keeping his leg; also, that Kenton's acquaintances and bosom friends down in Sydney, as evidenced by his conversation, did not do him credit. Being now well warmed up by the whiskey, he proceeded to give instances. He said that Kenton was a regular pal of the doctor who had been mixed up in that disreputable Ducane divorce (Cornwall was very new to the island, and had never heard Charmian's name), that the doctor had died lately, and Kenton had been with him. Somebody kicked Cornwall fiercely on the shin at this, but Cornwall, being more than half intoxicated, only swore at him, and went on. This Kenton, he said, had told him a queer thing. The doctor, who must have been a frightful blackguard—intemperate fellow, too, they said—had told Kenton, when he was just about going, that the evidence he gave in the divorce case was false, and the whole charge a lie. Told the whole thing, how he had—— What, in the name of several ugly things, did his neighbour (a lean, leather-faced miner, in a flannel shirt) mean by digging him, a Government officer, in the ribs like that? (This with great dignity.)

"Hold your tongue," said the miner plainly. "That lady's Mrs. Ducane."

The doctor, who was really not a bad young

fellow, being in truth nothing worse than an over-educated, under-vitalised slip out of a college nursery-garden, not yet acclimatised to the winds of the open world—set down his glass confusedly and begged the pardon of the extremely silent and pale-faced girl who was standing behind the counter. He thought she looked rather sick, and wondered why.

“You want a—want a—tonic, my dear,” he told her, staring at her glassy-eyed. “I’ll s-send you down some stick-stick—some sticknine to-morrow. If you’re Mrs. Ducane, my dear, got good news for you.”

It scarcely seemed possible that any human being should turn paler—yet she did.

“Good news,” repeated the doctor, nodding his head. “Kenton says—Ducane heard all about it—most awfully cut up—heard you were here—Kenton told him—he’s comin’ up by *Matunga*, day after to-morrow. Bygones be bygones, an’ have another wedding—that’s what he says, Kenton says. Wish you luck. You let me sen’ that sticknine? Pretty girl like you shouldn’t look——”

The floor was concrete; the bottle that Charmian had been holding made a fearful crash as it fell, and instantly the bar was filled with the pungent fumes of (alleged) green Chartreuse. She did not even stop to pick up the fragments. She made two steps to the door at the back of the bar and was gone. No one saw her face as she went.

Somebody told Figg that Mrs. Ducane was taken ill, and the landlord, with an ill-grace, left his after-dinner nap and came into the bar himself. More than ever he was resolved to-night that the Federal should know no more "charity."

Charmian, alone in her dark little bedroom, where the day-long heat from the iron roof and walls remained all through the stifling night, was lying face down on her bed, praying God to let her die to-morrow.

In the strange little island town of Samarai, the expression of every human feeling is strictly regulated by geographical conditions.

When you are in love, you walk round the island. You walk round it always, because this is the only available form of athletic exercise, but love makes you walk round it a great deal more than usual, partly because love is restless, and partly because you have always a chance of finding the beloved object somewhere on the circular track. When you are very much in love you walk round it in the moonlight, and sit on the seat below the powder magazine—not alone. If your love takes the regrettable form of a passion for one who is already "another's," you entice your Helen out boating to the quarantine island, and get sociably seasick in her company, while Menelaus, jealously surveying you with an opera-glass from the Government jetty, gloats over your agony. When you marry, you go

away in a cutter, the bride's white veil fluttering over salt green water, as you head for the cocoanut plantation down the coast that has been lent you for the honeymoon. When you die, they put your coffin in a whale-boat, and the mourners sit all round it, cramping their legs out of the way, and you are taken to the cemetery island and buried there, and the mourners go back in the boat without you, to finish their mourning in the bar of Bunn's Hotel. And when you are in trouble, with love and marriage and death and money and misery all mixed up together, like the ingredients of the witches' brew in *Macbeth*, you must inevitably go and sit on the top of the island, because that is the only spot in Samarai where, among the palms and the wet long grass, and the uncleared, untracked brushwood, you can be reasonably sure of a chance to cry unseen.

On the day before the *Matunga* was due from Sydney, via "ports," there was somebody up on the top of the island, in a quiet little spot where no casual passer-by need be feared—a place where the palms were young and small, and shut off all the splendid panorama of the Straits, with their low-swinging, criss-crossing feathers of gold-green. On the ground under the palms sat the refugee from the town, her arms clasped about her knees, her head on her arms, crying—crying—crying.

It was Charmian's way of meeting the emergencies of life. She had never been able to face things, or fight things, like stronger women—women who wore

black cashmere skirts and white blouses and flannelette petticoats, who did their hair in little walnuts on the top of their heads, and bargained with the butcher and the milkman in loud, firm tones. Charmian had never been able to bargain, or to make sensible clothes for herself, or to stand firmly upon flat-soled boots, and defy the people who differed from her. She wore the pretty things bought for her by the men who loved her—with a sigh for an impossible dream of pretty things bought by a man she might love herself: she gave in to anyone who spoke in a bullying tone: she did what she was told to do, whether she hated it or not: and when trouble came, she cried, or ran away.

Troubles had come in plenty to her sad little life, and now they were gathering again, thick as the rainclouds gather of a north-west afternoon, in the main range country of inland Papua. They were worse troubles than ever this time. Figg had discharged her: Scott was away in the un-get-at-able interior: Grant, hateful Grant, was coming up by the *Matunga* to-morrow to find and claim her again—after all that had passed—after all that she had paid for her wretched little freedom!—and worst of all, she could not run away. How could one run away from an island? where to run to, if one could, in this terrible country that was a mere welter of jungle, river, mountain, and marsh, inhabited by man-eating fiends and hungry alligators?

Remained but one thing to do, and Charmian was

doing it, bitterly, despairingly, soaking her handkerchief through, and spotting her dress, wishing, amidst the gusts of her misery, that she had only courage to go out to the end of the Government jetty, where the water was deep and green, and finish it all with one little jump into oblivion. . . .

“ I do think I could, if it were only drowning,” she sobbed into her wet muslin knees. “ But those horrible sharks. . . . Oh, if God would just let me die, any time before to-morrow! He knows I’ve got to die some time—what can it matter to Him whether it’s now, or in forty years? and it matters such a lot to me. I can’t, can’t, go back to Grant—and yet I know he will make me: he always made me do everything he said. And what is there to stop him? Oh, if I’d only married again—anyone, anyone! it would not have mattered whom, so long as it wasn’t him. If George were here he’d help me. He wouldn’t let Grant have me again, he’s so strong—and brave—and good. Oh, George! ”

The vision of Scott rose up before her, clear as a “ living picture ” in a cinematograph—the tall, big-boned figure with its slight stoop, the grey Irish eyes that were so kind and so pure: the smile, like sunshine of the North, bright, yet almost cold. . . . Behind it, overlapping it, driving it out, came another face—gross, red-skinned, shiny with high living—a face with murky, fiery eyes, with thick lips, half shut over cruel teeth, with black and grey hair growing low on the low forehead, and a heavy neck and chin

that rose in waves behind the fine, smart collar and costly tie. . . . The features were well-marked and regular: the figure of the man was good, though over-stout. There were many women who called Grant Ducane a handsome fellow. There was one to whom his face and himself were as the face and self of Satan—mid-Victorian, Calvinistic Satan, with horns and hoofs and tail and the flames and smoke of hell coming up out of the dark for background. . . .

. . . Charmian had done crying. She was leaning against the trunk of a palm, tired out, and scarce able to see with her swollen eyes. She knew she would begin again by and by, but for the moment the pendulum had swung back. Was it indeed hopeless? Could nothing—no drop of comfort or hope—be squeezed out of that letter of Scott's that she had carried night and day since it came? "Any trouble—call me—send for me——" He meant it, she knew. Most men didn't mean such things when they said them—they were only trying to make you think they were to be trusted when they were not—but Scott was of another kind.

Yet—how to send, when there was no time? when Grant would have come, and made his hateful explanations, and asked for the pardon that he did not deserve, and forced her to give it, and taken her away again to the old detestable life in England or somewhere far away—long, long before a letter could even reach the place where George had gone?

Charmian pressed her hands tightly together, and braced her body back against the tree as she sat. She would think. She would plan. There must be a way. A clever person would have found one out. Well, she had got to be clever—or else she had got to be brave enough to face the Government jetty—to-night, under the stars, when the town was asleep. . . .

“I will be clever,” said Charmian, wiping her eyes and setting tight her soft mouth. “I will. Please, God, make me clever—make me think of something!”

There was much of the child in Charmian. She closed her eyes and put her hands together, palm to palm, as she prayed her odd little prayer—just as she had done when she was three years old. She opened her eyes and unclasped her hands when she had finished—and there was a tall, strange woman climbing up the side of the hill.

The woman was not young, and she came slowly, with heavy, audible breathing. When she had reached the top, she looked about her; saw Charmian sitting under the palm, and walked straight up to her, with an air of decision and command that sat upon her as naturally as the fine crown of yellow-grey locks under her black shade-hat.

“Get up at once,” she said. . . . “It’s been raining all night, and you’ll catch your death.”

Charmian rose to her feet, because she usually did what she was told.

"No such luck," she said, with a quiver in her voice.

"That's naughty talk," said the tall woman reprovingly. "I'm afraid you're a naughty girl altogether, to sit crying up here in the wet grass, and then say you want to catch your death. When a girl behaves in such a silly way it's generally because she's been getting into mischief. Bless you, I know girls: I've got six daughters of my own; and if I'd ever caught one of them behaving so foolishly, I'd have taken her home and spanked her! Look at your dress—tut, tut! And you've been crying fit to make yourself sick. What do you mean by it?"

The tall woman stood above her, extremely erect, and shook her slightly by the shoulder, like a nurse remonstrating with a wilful child.

Charmian, her breast still heaving with the groundswell of the storm that had passed, her mouth half trembling, half laughing, felt suddenly and inexplicably safe. Had the stranger caressed her and purred over her, after the usual fashion of women consoling each other, she would have submitted, escaped as soon as possible, and gone back to her miserable problem unmoved. Caressing and purring was the way of women, in Charmian's experience: also scratching—one mattered as little as the other.

But this stranger, with the six feet of almost masculine strength, and the manner of Queen Elizabeth, shook her and scolded her . . . and immediately the lost and terrified feeling began to slip away.

There was safety and help somewhere in the world, after all.

She turned her eyes on the woman—Charmian's beautiful eyes, with the innocent soul looking out of their sad depths like snow-white Undine from her troubled pool—and fixed a steadily inquiring gaze upon the strange new friend. It was someone she had never seen before—of that she was certain. Who could forget such a personality?

She had not to wonder long.

"I'm Mrs. Carter," said the woman, still keeping hold of her shoulder. "Came in from my island to-day, and going up to my store at the Kikiramu to-night. And who are you, you silly, naughty girl?"

Charmian's eyes brightened: she knew all about Mrs. Carter—who in Papua did not? The Queen of North-West Island, she was called: and if half the tales told about her were true, she fully deserved the name. Twenty years before, when New Guinea knew neither law nor order, and every man who landed on its inhospitable shores went with his life in his hand night and day, Mrs. Carter had come to North-West Island and taken possession of it. There was gold there in those days, gold long since worked out. Mrs. Carter had kept a store for the diggers, nursed them when they were ill, traded with them when they were well; mothered them, advised them, kept them in order—with rifle and revolver sometimes, in the days when the scum of Sydney and Melbourne gutters streamed into the far-away

island, to try its luck digging or fleecing the diggers, as might seem easiest. When the diggers went, she cleared and planted her land, built a handsome house, and ruled the native population of the place as never a resident magistrate, with police and Government to back him, ruled elsewhere in Papua. In North-West Island alone the natives were clean, orderly, peaceable, and industrious, cultivating their land without quarrels, and gathering up the small remains of the gold from the worked-out diggings, year after year, to purchase luxuries for themselves and their families from Mrs. Carter's store. While over almost all the mainland, and the neighbouring islands, cannibalism, murder, and tribal warfare flourished unchecked.

She had even wiped out the native language of the place, or at least made it bi-lingual, for every North-West Islander spoke good English: and this excellent deed, in a land of Tower-of-Babel confusions, she had accomplished by means of a process that left Ollendorff, Gouin, and the inventors of Esperanto hopelessly in the shade. She had enclosed her house and grounds with a palisade, within which no word of the island language might be spoken, under pain of immediate and violent expulsion. It did not matter whether the offender had had any opportunity of learning English or not—like Nature herself, Mrs. Carter heard no excuses, listened to no pleadings. Out the speaker of alien tongues must go—away from the store where all the treasures dear to the

native heart were kept, and from the big backyard where the Queen, from time to time, gave royal feasts to all the natives she employed and many besides. No shopping, no feasting, no looking at the wonders of the house and verandah, and the astonishing children with white faces and straight yellow hair—nothing that made life worth living on North-West Island unless one learned the tongue of the Queen . . . the giant white woman who could shoot a bird flying high in air with either rifle or revolver, who laid it on to erring subjects with a big stick in a mighty hand, and whose husband, wonderful to see, was among the very humblest of her slaves. . . . They learned to talk English, or North-West, and they learned it quick.

Mrs. Carter's sons were grown up and gone away, all to Australia. They said, in their simple way, that New Guinea seemed too crowded for them, somehow, when they and mother were in it together: so they went south to the Northern Territory, and became drovers of cattle (it takes men to drive cattle in the Never-Never country of the North) and southward still, to West Australia and the goldfields, and away in pearling luggers along the burning coral coasts to Thursday Island, and to Broome. Mrs. Carter's daughters were married to various New Guinea traders and officials. Remained, Mrs. Carter's husband, a useful man to the Queen, and invaluable as a manager of her store on the Kikiramu goldfield. She visited the store now and then; but,

for the most part, in her kingdom of North-West Island, or in her trading-stations here and there about the coast, or in her allamanda- and bougain-villæa-covered cottage at Samarai, she was well content to reign alone.

All this Charmian had heard, and she looked at the tall woman with suddenly awakened interest. Mrs. Carter was certainly like Queen Elizabeth—very like. The arched, commanding nose, the determined mouth and pointed chin, the heavy eyelids and bright brown, gem-hard eyes were all Elizabethan. So was the mass of wavy yellow-grey hair above the high forehead: so was the poise of the head: so were the long thin hands. These last were work-worn and hardened, for Mrs. Carter had handled broom and frying-pan, pick, oar, and bullock-whip, in her day, doing the work of woman or man, or both together, as circumstances seemed to need: but they showed innate refinement, and power of command, to any eye trained in the spelling out of bodily signs. Her dress was made after a fashion of her own, suggestive of the eighteenth century. Where other women of Samarai, old and young, wore the inevitable dark cotton wrapper of a morning, and the inescapable coarse white muslin, with ugly lace trimmings, of an afternoon, Mrs. Carter was always seen in stately trained robes, made with the sacque pleat of Boucher and Watteau, and meeting the sun's fierce stare with soft reflections of heliotrope, gauzy black, or cloudy grey. She wore

a hat that sat like a shady crown: she carried a fan, for the most part, and held it like a sceptre.

It was with this fan that she now tapped Charmian's shoulder, a trifle impatiently, repeating her question—

“What are you doing here, you naughty girl, and what's your name?”

That name! Charmian felt like a leper of the Middle Ages, forced by law to carry a bell, and ring it to tell the unspotted people here and there that he carried with him a curse. . . . She must take up her bell and ring it. . . .

“I am Mrs. Ducane,” she said.

It came—the inevitable surprise and dismay: the inevitable chill in the friendly eyes. Then——

“Why, why, I've been hearing—they say the story wasn't true—they say the man confessed when he was dying . . .”

The eyes warmed up again: the fan ceased tapping her shoulder, and a hand took its place.

“Now aren't you really a very, very naughty girl, to be up here crying and talking of getting your death, when all that trouble's blowing over for you, after all? Of course I heard about it. Everybody did. But, bless you, my good girl, I think I wouldn't have believed it anyhow—after a look at you—even if this news hadn't come. You haven't kick enough in you to serve any man out like that—or to serve him out in any way at all. One hears he didn't treat you too well. Your own fault, I'll lay. You're

not the girl to keep your end up. Put them down, keep them down, my dear—that's the only way to manage the men. I hear he's coming to take you back: very right and proper of him too, but mind you put your foot on his neck this time and keep it there."

Mrs. Carter beat her own handsome foot on the earth, and ground it down as though the neck of the despised sex were indeed beneath the sole of her Sydney shoe.

"Put them down," she said again, with a flush on her faded cheek: and the thoughts in her eyes were not of Charmian at that moment.

The girl, mopping her wet face and her small pink nose with her wet handkerchief, looked up.

"I'd rather die in the bush and be eaten by meat-ants than ever see his face again," she said: and there was a driving force behind her words that made the woman look at her narrowly, as at something she did not quite understand.

"Tut, tut!" she said, after a minute. "A married woman's best to keep on terms with her husband. What can most of you do? You've got to give in, or starve. Make him pay for all he's done—it was mostly the fault of the other man, wasn't it?—make him pay well, and take him back."

Charmian did not answer, but her face grew white. So this refuge too was failing her!

She turned from Mrs. Carter with a sudden movement, and looked down upon the sea below—down

upon the Government jetty, where the water was deep and green, close inshore.

Something pricked Mrs. Carter's heart quick and keen. Something came back to her, at that look, which would have meant nothing at all to ninety-nine women in a hundred. As one might see a world of rocks and precipices, behind a veil of driven cloud lifted for a moment by the wind, she saw a vision of Charmian's little figure standing on the steps of the jetty, hands out to the water. . . . A girl had stood like that, on the rocks that border the deep green waters of the Gulf of Carpentaria—a girl with brown eyes and yellow-red hair and a plain gold ring on her hand—a tall, big girl with a heart as big as herself: too big for the keeping of little Tim Carter . . . in Queensland, thirty years ago. There had been times since then when the Queen of North-West had wondered why the girl had turned back to the land. If there had been times when she wished the girl had not, she never told herself.

There was silence for a moment under the palms, and then Mrs. Carter took Charmian by both arms and swung her round.

"Now, look here," she said, "who's the other man?"

"George Scott," said Charmian, paler than ever. "He's never—never—but I'd die, ten times over, rather than go back."

"Then what's the trouble?" asked the big woman.

“Grant will make me. He always did. Let me go—please!”

“I’ll do no such thing. You only want to go off and cry again, and you sha’n’t do it. I can’t make head or tail of you and your nonsense unless you tell me the whole thing from beginning to end. I see I sha’n’t have time now to look at the building sites up here before lunch, so I may just as well give it up to you. Out with it, miss!”

And Charmian told. From the beginning of her marriage through to its disastrous end, and down even to the letter that she carried in her pocket, she told the whole story. She did not cry any more: Mrs. Carter’s sharp Elizabethan eye was fixed upon her, and she was afraid to let the tears go, under that keen scrutiny. The Queen of North-West Island listened, silently and critically, and did not say a word till the other had done. Then she unfolded the fan with a sharp jerk, and began fanning herself, rapidly and strongly.

“Why doesn’t Scott ask you to marry him?” she demanded.

“I think—he hasn’t any money, except what he wants to go looking for gold with. And there’s something else too. I don’t know what. Sometimes I think there’s another woman. If there were, I think I’d just die.”

“Oh, pff! you make too much yap about dying!” said the pioneer woman contemptuously. “Does he want you, that’s the point? Don’t put on school-

girl airs, but just say, does he, yes or no? You're the kind they all want, more or less—you ought to have had experience enough to guide you."

"Yes, he does, then," answered Charmian, almost defiantly. "I do know. But I believe in my soul there is another woman."

"Why?" snapped Mrs. Carter.

"Well—just—because."

Mrs. Carter, being a woman herself, acknowledged the weight of this feminine reason sufficiently to accept it in silence. She bit the top of her fan and thought.

"There's only one way for it that I can see," she proclaimed. "You're just what you say—the sort that would allow your Grant to come back and carry you off like a dingo carrying off a turkey, with hardly a cheep for yourself. Well, the *Cora Lynn* sails for the Kikiramu at nine to-night, and there won't be another thing going for a fortnight—unless it's a stray cutter, that might take a month to get half-way, with this north-west weather. You pack up and come with me to the Kikiramu field, and if Scott's half the man you say he is, he and the Resident Magistrate will put it out of your Grant's power ever to worry you again, inside of half a day."

Charmian turned scarlet.

"How could I?" she said.

"Now don't make mouths, missy: you know you would rather go there than anywhere else on earth, and you needn't feel shy about it, either—I'll take

you as my visitor, and you can help me with my sewing at the store as long as you like. As for the other woman, why, wherever and whoever she is, she isn't in Papua, and better a living dog than a dead lion, say I. It's your innings, my girl: don't you trouble about her."

"I wasn't," said Charmian simply. "I wish she was dead."

"You and your dying! Such funeral talk I never heard. Wipe your eyes, and put your hair tidy, and come down with me to the town: you'll want to do some shopping first, and buy sensible boots and hats, and I'll see you do it. And if you're one minute late when the steamer whistle sounds to-night, don't think I'll keep her for you—I'll leave you behind for Grant. Girls like you are never punctual or tidy. I know the lot of you!"

Like a collie driving a lamb, she hustled her on to the pathway and down the long hill again.

Many people saw Figg's barmaid, who was under notice, going on the *Cora Lynn* in the starlight, after dinner. Half the town was going on to the vessel also, to gossip and to see off friends. But nobody noticed that, when the clumsy gang-plank was withdrawn, and the last whistle had sounded, the shore-going party did not include little Charmian Ducane.

CHAPTER XII

"DID I ever tell you," said Mrs. Carter conversationally, "about the time when I had a murderer chained under my bed for six weeks?"

"No, you did not," answered Charmian, looking up at her hostess with a slightly startled expression. She had not become quite accustomed to Mrs. Carter yet.

The two women were sitting on the verandah of the little brown mountain house where Carter kept store for the Kikiramu goldfield. The morning was hot and clear. There was not a shred of mist in the river-gorge, or on the great drop-curtain of forest that shut off the unknown inland ranges. Thirty or forty feet below the verandah rail two huge sapphire butterflies were sporting about the summit of a tree: in all the valley there was not another sign of life, save the stray columns of smoke that rose here and there above the crests of the leafy sea, each marking, like bubbles from a diver's helmet, the spot where a human being was living and working far below, hid from the light of day.

Charmian had been on the Kikiramu field for some days now, and the wonderful peace of the bush was beginning to flow over her heart, deep and still as the still deep forests that flow over the inland val-

leys and hills. The journey had been very rough and hard, even though Mrs. Carter cut the ordinary day's marches into two, and saw to it that a hammock was always ready to carry Charmian, whenever the track allowed. But the woman of cities and drawing-rooms had never faltered or complained. She only wanted to get away from Samarai as soon and as far as possible: the more difficult the way, the safer she felt from pursuit.

Here, in the heart of New Guinea, where she could look up her position on the map, and see that the little store lay actually over the edge of the known country, right in the blank white space beyond the dotted ends of guessed-at rivers, she felt that, for the present at least, she might surely call herself safe. Grant would not even know for some time where she had gone. Of course he would ferret it out in the end—the *Cora Lynn* had called at various plantations down the coast, and the news of her being on board would filter back at last to Samarai. But even then it might be some time before he could find any means of reaching the west end. And before he did—she might be safe.

She thought much about that, lying of nights in her quaint little bird-cage of a room, above the tree-tops of the gorge, with the night-long rain of the mountain lands roaring down upon the sago-thatch roof, and the unseen river rumbling away below.

She realised that most people would be on her husband's side—would say that the wrong which had

been done her could only be righted in full by a re-marriage, and that her reputation could be restored in no other way. Ducane, it appeared, was very penitent. The man who had caused the trouble, who had lied and perjured himself, and bought false witnesses, was dead—having confessed his infamy in the very hour of death. No doubt the public knew. No doubt they would look for a reconciliation. Less than no doubt Ducane would want it and have it—if she could not make herself safe.

. . . Arguments, defiances, objections—what were they? They could not help. Against every argument of hers he could bring a dozen. Against her little straw of defiance he could sweep the flame of the overruling will that she had known and suffered under all her life. . . . No, words were not to be trusted.

But facts? Facts fought for you. You could hide behind their shield, and say no word at all. Before the fact of another marriage, argument, entreaty, command must die on the lips that spoke them.

The words of Scott's letter flamed before her in the darkness of the nights.

“Any trouble you are in . . . send for me . . . I would do anything in the world to be of help to you. . . . I cannot say all that I would wish. . . . I am always yours. . . .”

The woman who had been loved of men since her childhood could make no mistake as to the meaning

of such words, though they stopped short of those three words that had been worth all the rest.

One could wait here . . . there was no harm in that. One could help Mrs. Carter with her sewing, and see the strange life of the goldfield, and listen for every word that bore upon the return of the men who had gone to look for gold . . . and hope.

Carter thought the party would run out of tucker very soon, and come back. He didn't think that they would get anything: but then, they might. That stone-broke fellow who had come up from Samarai last boat to cook for him had been quite certain there was gold up the Iri: so certain that he had bounced him, Carter, into "grubstaking" him (provisioning him on credit) and helping him to get a few boys.

Of course if they did get anything, the Kikiramu would be deserted straight away. Meantime, Carter thought it a good thing his wife had brought a visitor up with her: it was lonely for her when she came, as a rule, being the only woman on the field. And if Mrs. Ducane liked, he'd be glad to take her a walk about, and show her some of the claims, whenever she chose.

Charmian went out under his guidance here and there, down the giant staircase, through the riverbed, from one dim isolated camp in the wilderness to another, seeing the black boys at work, lunching in "bushes" on tinned foods and biscuits, talking with the strange, silent, bearded men who won the gold,

and refusing, with difficulty, presents enough of their gainings to have stocked a small jeweller's store. For months after, in many a lonely camp and clearing, her visits were remembered and talked over, and her beautiful, sad, sweet face (in which the sunshine of peace began to dawn these days) floated among the stars of midnight before the eyes of solitary men, who sat awake among their sleeping "boys," with only the dying fire for company. No one thought it strange that she should have come to stay in that remote fastness. They said, "their oath, it was a shame and a waste"; but they themselves had, most of them, more or less secret reasons for choosing to live beyond hail of civilisation, and they asked no questions of Charmian, as they asked none of one another.

So, on that hot still morning, with the jewelled butterflies floating in the sun outside, and unseen birds of paradise sending long calls from the bush, Charmian sat on Mrs. Carter's verandah and listened to the pioneer woman's tales.

"It was a good few years ago," said Mrs. Carter, biting off her thread. "My husband had gone down to Queensland to see about buying some cattle, and I was alone on North-West, except for the kiddies. The natives had been quiet for a long time, but just about then, one of the fellows from the far end of the island, where they were pretty wild, started lording it over the rest of the place, killing and burning alive and eating everyone he'd a fancy to. Now,

you know, that made me mad, for I thought I had both ends of the place in such order that there wasn't a cheep out of one of them—but you never know these natives. Well, I made up my mind to shift my gentleman out of that, quick and lively, and I took a few of my own boys, armed with Winchesters, and a bit of tucker, and my little mare that I'd had up from Charters Towers, and off I went to teach the fellow what for."

"What did you wear?" asked Charmian, with interest.

Mrs. Carter, being quite as much a woman as her guest, saw nothing remarkable in the inquiry.

"Well, now, I'll tell you," she said. "I wore a blue denim skirt, made very short, and a pair of my husband's bluchers—he has a very small foot, and they fitted me. And I had a red Turkey cotton blouse on my back, and a white flannelette, to change, in the swag the boy was carrying. And I had a navy blue leather belt, with a black leather holster on it, and a 45 Colt in the holster. And I'd a ten-inch knife in a black sheath at the other side of the belt. My hat was a big Panama, with a red silk scarf round it, and I'd a navy blue tie."

"It would have looked better if your holster and knife-sheath had been blue," said Charmian thoughtfully.

"It would," agreed the Queen of North-West Island, "but they don't make fancy colours, not in revolver holsters. Well, to cut a long story short,

I and the boys had a two-days' hunt before we got him; and even when we'd found him, the people of the village were that afraid of him that they wouldn't give him up, so I had to take my Colt in one hand and my riding-whip in the other—they were about the same afraid of the two—and hunt through all the houses till I got him—hidden away under a roll of mats, if you please, and not looking a bit like the devil of a fellow they said he was, with all the war-paint running in streaks over his face, on account of the heat of the mats, and the feathers in his hair tumbling out and smashed. I gave him a good thrashing on the spot, just to teach him that I would have no cannibal nonsense going on in my island, and then I tied him with a long rope to my saddle, and made him follow me home—with all the natives raising a howl as if he was dead, and flinging themselves down on the ground, and cutting their faces.

“Well, when I got him home, there was the difficulty. I wanted to have him taken away to Port Moresby to be tried and hung, but I'd had prisoners before waiting for the Government yacht, and, somehow or another, most of them had managed to get away—you see, the natives would help them, being frightened of them for the most part, and anxious to get into their good books—specially if they were sorcerers. He was a bang-up sorcerer, this gentleman, and I was sure they'd have him out if I put him in any of the stores. So I just took him down under

the house, and ran a chain from his waist up through the floor right on to the leg of my bed in the room above. And then at any time of the night, if they tried to get the chain off him, I was bound to know: besides, I could more or less see through the floor, it being sticks, as usual. And so I kept him there till the *Merrie England* called, and then they took him off to gaol in Port Moresby. He wasn't hanged, but he got ten years, and died before two were out; and the natives thought the Government had eaten him, so it had an excellent effect. Indeed, it was the last case of cannibalism that happened on the island."

Mrs. Carter took another needleful of thread.

"Would you have feather-stitching or French knots on the edge of the collar?" she asked thoughtfully.

"French knots, I think," answered Charmian. "They're very smart in black. . . . Didn't you think they might have eaten you?"

"No fear: I'd like to have caught them at it!" replied Mrs. Carter, with a fine disregard of physical possibilities. "I'm afraid I can't do the French knots right. Can you manage them?"

"Oh yes, do let me. I'll embroider it all over for you, if you like—any kind of embroidery you choose," offered Charmian, eager to help.

"Could you?" asked the pioneer woman a little wistfully. "And you can speak French, and play the piano, and all that sort of thing, I reckon?"

"Why, yes, but I don't know that it has ever done me much good."

"I wish I'd had more education myself," mused Mrs. Carter, looking a long way off over the valley.

"Old woman," said the shadowy Carter, suddenly popping out from the doorway of the store, "don't you wish any such thing. You're that clever as it is that no one would want to see you more so. If you'd had education on the top of it, maybe you'd have been in gaol by now."

"And I daresay that's true," agreed Mrs. Carter composedly. "Mrs. Ducane, I won't ask you to embroider it all over, but I should like the French knots, if you think you could manage them. I'm glad to see you picking up and taking your tucker these few days. You're not quite as silly as you were when I first ran across you. If I'd the handling of you a bit longer I'd make a smart sensible girl out of you yet."

"She's coming round," Mrs. Carter told her husband that night as they were going through the store and putting out the lights. "My word, Tim, you should have seen her dancing to herself just about sunset, out on the track, when she thought there was nobody about. It's a way she has, and the prettiest way I ever saw. She picks up her skirts, and she sings a little bit, and she floats in the air, or it looks near like that—just like a flower tossing in the wind. You'd think she didn't know she was doing it, any more than the flower itself. I declare to goodness she didn't look a day over sixteen—and she all

of five-and-twenty. Of all the babies to be a married woman—but there, I always did have a weak place for babies.”

“She’s a baby could do mischief whenever there was men about,” observed Carter, piling his mats of rice into a sturdy bulwark. “The men’s been coming in here something amazing since you brought her—just to get a look at her round the corner.”

“I daresay,” said the Queen contemptuously. “Baby faces are the thing to fetch you, all the lot of you, like sugar fetches flies. And whether the baby face will look as nice to you across the top of a burnt pie, or a batch of bread gone sour, is a thing you never think about, no more than a New Guinea nigger thinks about heaven. Their looks have to sweeten their cooking, for the most part.”

“Well, old woman, your cooking doesn’t need that sweetening,” remarked Carter, with some obscure intention of a compliment.

“Pff!” said the Queen. “Don’t you forget to lock that door.”

It was very hard to take a walk at the Kikiramu.

You could take a plunge, or a dive, or a climb—in fact, you were obliged to take one or the other as soon as you left your house. You could let yourself down hundreds of feet of log stairs, hanging back by the liana hand-ropes, until you got into a dim green wilderness of forest and riverbed, and broken-down flumes, and abandoned races: and then you

could climb and wade along the edges of the river, until you got wet through, and had to go home for a change. Or else you could scramble up three or four hundred feet of the other staircase—the giant one, with the steps as big as dinner-tables—and get caught in a sudden thunderstorm in the very middle of it, with no more possibility of crawling away in time than if you had been a fly in a treacle plate. Or you could cross the ridge at the top of the valley, climbing slowly, with hands and feet, and immediately take a header down the other side. But if you wanted a walk, it was hard to get.

There was just one place where you might manage it. After you climbed the great staircase, you could find a piece of track that ran for a little way along the top of the ridge before it plunged down the long six-hundred-foot drop that tired the carriers so, when they came up laden from the lower reaches of the river. On this comparatively level bit you might walk up and down, like a captain pacing his bridge, and, like the captain, look about you and see all over your little kingdom.

And here, in the afternoons, before the breaking up of the four o'clock rains, Charmian used to walk alone, up and down, looking into the depths of the formidable forest, and thinking.

Always her thoughts went one way—Scott. This little creature, made for love, had no interests, recollections, ambitions, in her life, save those that were linked to love. Love light and amusing, sugar-kiss

flirtation—that was girlhood. Love tyrannical, possessive, selfish—that was marriage. Love treacherous, leading to perilous swamps by the lure of poison-sweet flowers—that was romance. And all these loves, with her, had been love accepted, not given. The men who had made her life for her had not asked her for anything but acceptance.

To Scott alone she had given. And it came upon her now that whatever the end might be, this free giving of hers was what none of the other loves had been—life itself. Loving her might be what the other men had lived for—so they had said, more than one of them. But no one had wanted to know what she lived for: nor did she know herself—in the time that was past. Now she knew.

When would he come back?

She had gone up to the top of the ridge one afternoon, a still, scented day, with a purple-grey sky of brooding heat. She had spent half an hour at her looking-glass before leaving the house, as she always did, “just in case . . .”

She was sure, somehow or other, that he would come that day, and she waited long, bitterly disappointed, till it was almost too dark to get down the great log staircase . . .

And, after all, he came that night.

Charmian was asleep in her little stick-walled bedroom, “papered” with calico. The Carters were asleep in their lean-to close at hand—a curious apartment walled with split logs and floored with the tops

of packing-cases. The native carriers attached to the store were asleep in their shed a little way off: they had eaten a big python, an iguana, and the best part of a wild pig for supper, and lay gorged and stupid about the fire that they had built to keep off ghosts. The rain was making so much noise that no one heard the approach of Scott and his train until the verandah, all of a sudden, shook and thundered under the tramp of an army of bare feet and the shock of twenty loads thrown down. Charmian, springing half out of bed in a wild alarm of Karivas, was stopped by the sound of Scott's voice loudly hailing the Carters, and the answering exclamation from the storekeeper's room. In a moment, it seemed, lights were flitting everywhere, wood was being chopped in the cookhouse, men were waking on the back verandah (where the spare beds were put) and jumping up with loud thuds, dogs were barking, natives and whites calling to each other. The whole house was awake—not only awake, but excited. Surely something beyond the ordinary return of an ordinary party had happened!

Charmian, barefooted and in her nightdress, slipped over to the wall that partitioned her room from the main verandah, tore a thread or two of the calico screening, and peeped through the sticks, her heart thumping so that she could hardly stand. The verandah was full of men, mostly in pyjamas,—Jacky and Jimmy and Harry and Mike, bearded, strange-eyed men from the outer camps, who had

"come in" the night before: another visitor, the resident magistrate and warden, an angelic-looking young man with curly hair and a sweet smile, who was as tough as pinwire, and about as hard: Carter, bringing whiskey out of the store, and setting it down on the log table: Mrs. Carter, stirring round after the house-boys, and getting plates and food carried in from the kitchen: a crowd of native carriers, laying down miscellaneous bundles of tent-flies, cooking pots, sago, sacks of food, rifles, and shotguns, and drifting away to the boys' house in the yard, as they rid themselves of their loads. The dull orange light of two or three hurricane lamps fell on the glittering bodies of the carriers, wet with rain, on the white tooth necklets they wore, and the red and yellow leaves in their mountainous hair. The white men's striped pyjama suits stood out gaily against the black curtain of night and rain beyond the verandah rail. On the table, pink ham, a crusty loaf, a tin of butter, lobster, asparagus, peaches, and other canned luxuries from the store, were rapidly surrounding the bottles, glasses, and cups. It looked as though the Carters were minded to make a feast.

All this Charmian saw with half an eye, in half a second. Almost instantly her glance swept on to the central figure in the strange, uncivilised scene—Scott.

He stood in the middle of the whites, leaning up against the verandah rail as though he were tired with the day's tramp, and patiently answering the showers of excited questions cast at him by everyone

who could get in a word. She could not hear what they were saying, because of the noise of the rain, but she could see that something had happened, and that Scott was telling about it: also, that he was fagged out, and wanted rest and food, and the other men would not let him have either. She burned with rage and pity—what brutes men were to each other!

Standing there in her nightdress, with the wet warm wind blowing through the chinks of the crazy wall, she took her fill of gazing. . . . He was changed. He had grown older and graver, even in those few weeks—so quickly does the Land of Mystery set her seal on those who serve her. But the bright, cool sunshine of his eyes and smile—the sunshine of that far Northland that she had never known—was the same.

She found herself seeking for words to clothe a thought that floated before her, naked, dim, elusive. She had never been good at handling and clothing ideas, though her active brain brought forth its full share. People had not asked her to have ideas, or to express them. They had asked her to be pretty and charming, no more.

And now she was trying to be more, and she could not.

The idea was one of importance: she knew that. She stretched out at its flying wings with the fingers of her mind, frowning as she thought, and still looking through the chinks at Scott.

. . . The love of the North. . . . The love of the

South. . . . Dark and true and tender is the North, and bright and fierce and fickle is the . . .

"No—oh no!" said little Charmian, her lip beginning to quiver. ". . . Fickle is the South—no—if I only were!

"There's something I'm afraid of in his face," was what she sobbed to herself at last. "I could do anything with poor Rupert. And Scott loves me far more, but with him—— There are men who would break your heart and their own just as they'd break a thread—a leaf—I can't say it, but I know what I mean.

"I've been saying all my life that men are too bad," she told herself, "and now there's one who's too—too—good.

"But I'm thinking such nonsense," she said. "I don't know what I mean myself. And I must hurry up and dress at once. Oh, I wonder would it be wicked to pray that I may do my hair really well?

"At any rate," she said, "it would do no harm. I'll pray God to make me look very, very pretty indeed: that'll include the hair."

She prayed rapidly and inclusively while she dressed, not forgetting, all the same, to "keep her powder dry" so far as to select her prettiest blouse, and her long Sydney riding-boots, because they looked so well under the brief skirts one had to wear at the Kikiramu. The trade glass on the wall gave back a gratifying reflection by the light of the hurricane lamp.

"Thanks very much, O Lord," she said. "I don't think I ever looked nicer . . . if I weren't so pale."

There was a little pot of rose-red powder in her trunk. She took it out, looked at it thoughtfully, then put it back.

"I won't," she decided. "He would think it horrible if he knew" (he in this case meaning Scott, not the Almighty). "And, anyhow, rouge is only for women who are wicked, or women who are dreadfully miserable, and want to hide it. It's really bad to put it on for mere becomingness, and I never did, so back it goes."

Nature, waiting with the rose of life in her hand, out there on the verandah, invisible, but strong, touched the cheeks of the girl with the petals of the immortal flower as she came into full view of her lover, and Charmian, feeling her own beauty run through her veins like wine, knew that no rouge was needed.

So, like a rose indeed she came into his sight, shining out in the rabble of rough whites and naked savages, under the flickering glare of the hurricane lamps, against the background of the dark and roaring rain.

And when Scott saw her he ceased speaking.

"Go on!" yelled half a dozen voices. "Sticking in the reef like plums—go on! How much of it was in sight—how far do you reckon it runs down? How . . ."

They drowned each other in questions. They seemed half mad with excitement: every man's face was red or pale beyond common, and some of them were thumping wildly on the table, or half dancing on the shaky floor. Mrs. Carter seemed to be keeping her head better than the men: she was busy with plates and glasses, listening, but asking no questions, and her face showed no especial pleasure. Tim was transfigured: he was hanging on Scott's words as though they were veritable gold: he was uttering strange ejaculations, and giggling like a girl.

But the crowd were left to ask unanswered when Charmian came in. Straight to her went Scott, and "the light that never was on sea or land" was in his eyes as he took her hand.

"You here!" he said. "Charmian, I thought it was your ghost—your little ghost—when I saw——"

He dropped her hand, and suddenly his eyes, though looking into hers, were veiled.

"You have come up to see the field?" he said, in another voice. "I hope you'll have a pleasant time. You'll pardon my going back to these men, won't you, Mrs. Ducane? The fact is, our party have got onto very good gold, and they are all anxious to hear about it."

"I am glad you have been fortunate," said Charmian, feeling her transient roses ebb away.

"We have: I must tell you by and by," said Scott,

moving back to the men and being instantly absorbed once more.

Charmian joined Mrs. Carter and began helping her with the supper.

"That's a good girl," said the lady of the house, with something less than her usual sharp decision of tone. "Come out to the store and help me to open some more tins: they'll be wanted."

In the comparative quiet of the store, as they took down the tins and sawed them open, tumbling the contents into plates, the two women had a chance to speak.

"What's it all about? I don't half understand," said Charmian.

"Why, I reckon they've struck it rich, somewhere up on the Iri. Scott's come down to file the claim for the lot of them, with the warden here. He'll be off again as soon as he's loaded up with tucker. Every mother's son on the field will be off too, I reckon, Carter among them."

"And you?" asked Charmian, her head bent very low over the clumsy tool in her hand.

"And you, you mean," corrected Mrs. Carter, with a hard laugh. "It's all the same, however. You and me together don't go for so much as a rotten stick in the Kikiramu in flood—now. You've got to learn, my girl, how much a woman counts in a gold rush."

She swept her tin-opener round the top of a can

of grapes, and poured them bubbling out on to a plate.

"I hadn't seen Tim—not for a year," she said, in a dry, indifferent tone. "Hand me that pickle bottle. He gets asthma sometimes. Always bad in the high country under canvas. And he lives in wet clothes day and night, out of sheer damn foolishness. Some of these days—— Men are babies, the whole lot of them. You don't know—you're a girl."

"I think you forget I'm a married woman—or was," said Charmian quietly.

"Oh no, I don't forget you've been to church with a man," answered the other woman, piling biscuits on plates with the rapidity and precision of a machine. "But you aren't a real wife, and you never was. You don't know. You've been a man's pet cat, and purred on a cushion to please him. There's all sorts of marriage, and a lot of it isn't marriage at all. If you'd ever been a real married woman, instead of just a plaything that a man had to pay for with a ring, you'd know they was all babies—you'd know your husband was far more your child than any of your children. . . . If you're done, pick up them forks—you'll find more in paper in the drawer, and come along. Don't drop anything—you girls are that butter-fingered. . . ."

Charmian, a little dizzied by the hail of hard facts that had just been rained about her ears, followed mechanically in her hostess's track, without

asking herself why she, a gentlewoman, delicately bred, should act parlourmaid to all these rough men. Here, in the Never-Never land, where so many of the small things of life seemed to have been sifted away, the big things stood out with uncompromising plainness. It was the place of a man to protect a woman, to put a roof over her head, and to keep her. It was the place of a woman to see to the comforts of a man. You did not ask, first of all, whether the man were on the dinner-list at the Federal Government House, and if he used the proper kind of engraved visiting-cards when he went calling, with the right combination of boots and suit on, and the right kind of tie, tied by hand. . . . This was the Never-Never country, where such things did not matter. If you did not like it, you could go back to Sydney.

“If you’d been a real married woman, you’d know they was all just babies. . . .” The sentence buzzed in her ears as she came out into the verandah again and set down her load on the table, about which the men were beginning to gather. Scott had been set free at last, and had found a place at the end of the log bench. He was reaching hungrily for tea, and his face, through the yellow tan of the bush, was white with weariness. Charmian slipped into a seat and helped herself to something, she scarcely knew what, in order to have an excuse to stay and look. It was so delightful to see him eat. He had

got some salmon on his plate now—and bread—and pickles.

Tears almost came into her eyes. She would have liked to stand beside him and help him to all he wanted. She would have liked to feed him with a spoon. . . . Would not he shout with laughter if he could read her silly thoughts! Yet—she supposed—most women cared for men.

“You’d know your husband was far more your child than any of your children.”

“Why—that’s what she meant!” thought Charmian in a flash of illumination. “How I used to hate to watch Grant at his dinner! He ate so much and his face grew so red! But if . . . he . . . ate too much, I wouldn’t mind. I wish he would: he never eats enough. I wish they wouldn’t keep him talking so much.”

The food on her plate turned to sawdust then, and she could not get on with it, for she remembered what it was they were talking about—this find of gold, this hateful thing that (she felt in her heart) would put yet another obstacle between her and him. Another . . . ? What was the first? Well, about that she did not want to think.

It was near three in the morning now, and supper was done, but talk still kept on. The rain had stopped: the valley below was full of sweet wet smells, and a cold night breeze was beginning to blow down from the far main range. The Kikiramu sang a deep, full-throated song at the bottom of the

gorge—the war-chant of the wild, unbroken land that these strong men were seeking to break and tame.

Charmian crept away to bed with the sound of that song in her ears. Scott had looked at her many times in the course of the evening—but he had come near her, or spoken to her, scarce at all.

When she slept she dreamed that she stood somewhere in empty space, “whether in the body, or out of the body,” she knew not; and that Scott stood near her: but that she could not reach him, or touch his hand, because of two strange shapes that pressed her away. One of the shapes was veiled and dim: the other was clear to her sight. It was the figure of a woman, dark and savage, with cruel beautiful eyes and bloodstained mouth. With one hand the woman held her away, and with one she held the man, tight as the white-toothed alligator holds in the steaming swamps of the river lands. And the name of the woman was Papua.

Charmian awoke. She had thrown off the sheet, and felt cold. The house was still at last, and the dawn was creeping down, purest gold, from the peaks of the German ranges. The girl sat up and flung aside her net to look out across the valley.

“They say this country is full of witchcraft,” she thought. “I believe it was a vision. I believe, between them, they will take him away.”

CHAPTER XIII

MELBA was singing in the Kikiramu valley.

In the full white blaze of morning, from the rocks of the riverbed to the trembling finials of the trees that crowned the ridge, rose and sank down the golden voice. Across the leaf-embroidered heights of the giant staircase, away to the broken flumes and bush-grown races in the branchy depths below—from the great drop-curtain of forest that might well hide peering eyes of the dreaded Karivas, to the little cleared and built-on piece of land, where stood the rough brown buildings of the store—Melba was singing.

“Falling leaf and fading tree . . .
Shadows rising on you and me,
Shadows rising on you and me.”

Here, where never leaf seemed to fade, or summer to die, Melba was singing of waning suns and dying flowers.

“The swallows are making them ready to fly,
Wheeling out on a windy sky,
Good-bye, summer—good-bye, good-bye!”

Down in the gorge a scarlet bird of paradise went by, like a comet dropped from heaven: little jewelled

king-birds, swaying on scented orchid bloom, bathed their shining feathers in the sun that never failed.

“Hush! a voice from the far away,
Listen and learn, it seems to say,
All the to-morrows shall be as to-day,
All the to-morrows shall be as to-day,
The cord must break, and the lamp must die,
Good-bye to hope, good-bye, good-bye!”

Scott was climbing up the giant stairway at the head of his trail of carriers. All the way the voice beat upon him as a wave beats on a swimmer half buried in the surf. Its golden spray deafened and blinded him. It seemed to fill the world.

“Good-bye, summer—good-bye, good-bye!”

Under the diamond rays of the New Guinea morning, with the scent of unfading flowers rising among trees that were always green and young, summer was dying.

“What are we waiting for, O my heart?
Kiss me straight on the brows, and part. . . .”

Not even a kiss! not even a kiss to take with him on the long journey into winter and dark that must last the rest of his life. How could a lover be altogether unhappy if he had a kiss to carry with him? But he had not had a kiss from Charmian. He had held her hand, and let it go, and gone.

“What are we waiting for, you and I? . . .
Good-bye for ever! good-bye! good-bye!”

The voice, the marvel of a century, rose into a passionate cry that embodied all the pain of all the lovers' partings in all the world. How could one feel such pain and live? How could one go on, stumbling up the ferny steps of the great staircase, with the forest ahead, and the brown, naked, cannibal carriers behind,—the long day's tramp to come, the rivers to ford, the camp to make in the wilderness at night,—as though the world held nothing of her?

He did not know how. He only knew that he was going.

"Good-bye for ever!"

They had reached the top of the ridge. The voice was growing faint.

"Good-bye! Good-bye!"

They were over and plunging down the steep. Melba's voice was still.

Tim Carter, sitting on his verandah, took the finished record out of his new gramophone and slipped in another.

"I don't think much of that," he remarked to himself. "I'll have something tastier this time."

And in another moment the valley rang to the strains of "Stop Yer Ticklin', Jock!"

He had scarcely settled down to enjoy the song when a terrible thing happened. Someone, tall, furi-

ous, and very much out of breath, swept on to the verandah like a "gooba" (a New Guinea hurricane), there was a rush, a smack, and Tim fell half over the side of his canvas chair, rubbing his ear.

"Old woman! old woman!" he groaned, without looking up. "What have you got against me now? What is it I've done this time?"

"Got against you?" demanded Mrs. Carter, dropping into a chair and speaking between exhausted gasps. "If I could have climbed up that confounded lower ladder in time, I'd have let you know! I was down at Mick's camp—he's ill—and I heard you begin that thing when I was half-way up those steps from the river—and I could no more hurry—Tim Carter, you're a born fool, if ever there was one!"

"Well, well," said Tim pacifically, content, as he had been content a hundred times, to accept what he could not understand, "better take a bit of a rest: there's a lot to do by and by, with all the men getting off, the stores coming up from the landing. There's fifteen carriers from the *Dragon-Fly* in half an hour ago—they brought my new gramophone."

"Oh, you—you——" Mrs. Carter was on her feet again. "You and your gramophone!" the words were charged with blistering scorn. Mrs. Carter fanned herself fiercely, and looked at her husband as though she could say a good deal more, but refrained, for reasons known to herself, and incomprehensible by him.

Her silence, as she rose again, and moved across the verandah in the direction of Charmian's room, was of such a highly charged kind that Tim, fearing to cut the wire by some unguarded word or act, fairly held his breath until his better half had disappeared. Then he slipped away on tiptoe, out to the native carriers' shed in the yard, carrying his silenced gramophone in his hands. Shortly after, the raucous scream of a Cockney recitation rose on the heated air, mingled with the delighted "Woofs" of the house-boys.

Mrs. Carter, left alone, stalked, like a tall Fate with a flat hat on, into Charmian's bedroom, and planted herself beside the bed.

Charmian was lying on her face, with the heels of her shoes pointing up to the sago-thatch ceiling. Her hair had come down, and was spread all over the pillow. . . . Her round waist and finely sculptured thigh, beneath the twisted folds of the cotton dress, had the beauty of the wind-blown figures in the Elgin Marbles. And no marble could have been more still.

"She's taking it hard—confound Tim and his 'Good-byes!'" thought Mrs. Carter. For a minute or two she waited. A bird in the forest called—"O-tui O! O-ree! O-ree!" It was half dark in the brown-walled room: light shot in long spears through the floor.

Charmian lay still.

"Tui! Tui!" The mate of the bird was an-

swering from far away. "Tui! Tui! I hear you, love!" The thousand warm scents of the tropic forest, the glory of the eternal tropic sun, were in that call. The bird loved, and was happy.

Charmian stirred restlessly, and flung her hand across the edge of the bed. A long sigh passed over her, shaking her as the wind shakes the spear-grass at sundown.

"Mrs. Ducane," said the tall Fate.

"I want to be alone." Scarcely to be heard, muffled by long brown hair, came the reply.

"I know you do," answered Mrs. Carter, "but I'm not going to let you. It's not time to cry till you know you've reason."

"I'm not crying." Charmian turned on her side and looked up. Her face was deadly white, and her eyes were underlined with splashes of purple, but she was not shedding tears, nor had she shed any.

"Things you can cry over aren't . . ." Her voice trailed away. "If the end of the world came, you wouldn't . . . cry . . ."

"My God! how you do lie down to things!" said the woman who had tamed North-West. "Before I'd let a man treat me like that——"

"Did you marry the man you cried about most?" asked Charmian, sitting up and flinging back her hair.

Mrs. Carter's hard, handsome face grew slowly red.

"No," she said.

"Then I don't see how you can talk." Charmian was aroused now, and looked at the other with the instinctive hatred of woman against woman, that flashes out beneath the crust of civilisation when love's volcano-fire begins to play.

"You're a lot braver and stronger than I am, but you couldn't help yourself either. You needn't come and triumph over me. We're all unhappy together—women—that's the truth. I don't believe in the story of the snake and the apple, but there's something true in it somewhere. Life couldn't be so abominable to us if we hadn't somehow done something that had to be punished."

She put her hands over her face suddenly.

"Oh, I'm talking—talking," she said, "and he's going away . . . all the time, I don't know why I can't cry. I'm . . . broken . . . somewhere."

"Look here,"—Mrs. Carter had sat down on the bed beside her and taken her hand into firm custody—"let's drop all that skite and come to facts. Why has he left you? This week or two that he's been here you was never away from one another. You was walking on the ridge, and sitting on the log staircase, and spooning on the verandah in the moonlight, and getting up to see the sun rise, and—well, what does it all mean?"

"It means—the other woman," said Charmian. The momentary excitement had faded: she was sitting in a crumpled heap on the bed, her eyes like gold-brown flowers that had faded in the rain.

"What other?" Mrs. Carter spoke with a certain sharpness, expressive of her contempt for the ways of men in general.

"He never told me. He only said—to-day—when his boys were ready, and they put the loads on—he just said, 'If I were free——' and then he took my hand, and then he went away."

"Did you tell him about the Ducane man?"

"Yes. Yesterday. He said I must never go back to him."

"Oh, he did, did he? And did he tell you how you were going to manage to live—not that I wouldn't keep you as long as you like, my girl, but I know you——"

"No, I wouldn't—thanks. What does it matter how I live? I shan't live long!"

She had propped her little chin on her hands, and with her hair falling all about her, was looking out through the low window, a long, long way, beyond the valley, and the forest curtain, and the far high peaks of the German ranges—whither?

"Don't look like that: you give me the blooming shivers," said the other, shaking her slightly. Char-mian turned away from the window and sank back on her pillow again, face hidden. You could see the life slipping away from her as you might see the sap in a withering flower.

"Oh, hell!" said the woman of the backblocks, standing up straight and tall, with her hands on her hips, and setting her face in a baffled frown. For

once she had met with a situation she could not handle.

She swung her foot irritably as she stood—a trick she had in moments of annoyance. The toe of her shoe struck against a parcel lying on the floor, half under the bed. In spite of the swinging stroke the parcel moved not at all. Mrs. Carter looked at it. It was a smallish oblong packet, sewn up in ship canvas, rather like a loaf of bread in shape and size. She bent down and put one hand under it to lift it. It stirred no more than if it had been nailed to the floor. She took both hands and raised it with a mighty heave. In spite of her strength she could scarcely hold it.

“MY OATH!” she panted. “Gold!” She set it down on the bed, and the crazy piece of furniture creaked with its weight.

“Here,” said Mrs. Carter, pulling Charmian up with small ceremony, “what on earth do you mean by having a fortune lying on your floor? What’s the gold? Where did you get it? My oath! there’s every weight of eight hundred ounces in that. If Scott left it for you to take care of——”

“He didn’t,” answered Charmian in a dull, uninterested voice. “He gave it to me.”

“Gave it to you!” Mrs. Carter could scarcely find words. “Why, it must be every bit he’s got!”

“It isn’t. He said it was half.”

“And you leave three thousand pounds, or thereabouts, lying under your bed!”

"I didn't know it was so much," said Charmian, her face showing some disquiet. "It was such a small parcel. . . . He gave it to a boy to carry to my room. He said it was half of his gold, and I was to keep it, to prevent my having to go back to . . . He was saying good-bye—and I couldn't think of anything else. . . . What does it matter? He's gone."

Her face was like an alabaster lamp when the flame is dead within.

"Matter?" said Mrs. Carter vigorously. "I should think it did matter. If you're going to take three thousand pounds from him, you may as well have it put away in Tim's safe. . . . My word! they must have struck it rich all right—there won't be a digger in New Guinea but will be up on the field in another month—and from Australia, too. . . . Half of what he got! Eight hundred!—There, let's take it to the scales."

She trod heavily out of the room, carrying the parcel of gold nursed in her arms.

"Tim!" she called. "Tim! You come along here, quick and lively. Tim!"

"Eight hundred and sixty-three ounces!" she proclaimed, returning by and by with the parcel still in her arms, freshly sewn up. "Three thousand and sixty-three pounds, or thereabouts, in money. Over fifty pounds sheer weight, avoirdupois. And what am I to do with it, Mrs. Ducane?"

There was no answer from the bed. She bent down and looked at the girl. Charmian seemed asleep, but she did not wake when spoken to, and her pulse, when Mrs. Carter lifted the delicate wrist, was very slow and faint. It grew fainter as the older woman held it.

“Brandy!” called Mrs. Carter, sending the gold under the bed with a kick. “Brandy, Tim—she’s got a heart attack, or something like it.”

The shadowy Tim drifted in with a bottle and glass, waited while his wife poured out and applied the remedy, saw the fluid trickle down unswallowed on the pillow, and watched still, while Mrs. Carter briskly, efficiently, yet with a growing shade of anxiety in her face, tried one fainting-fit remedy after another—to no effect. Charmian breathed quietly, her pulse beat, though slowly. But she did not regain consciousness.

Some white men came in from the camps, bound, like all the rest, for the new discovery. Tim went out to attend to them, to sell them stores from the stock that had arrived by the *Dragon-Fly*, tell the story of the golden reef over and over again, and served drinks that grew stiffer and more numerous as the day went on. There were several men singing and quarrelling on the verandah before the sun began to sink. A train of boys, apparently masterless, came down the log staircase, and began drifting about among the carousing men.

"Here, you, where do you come from?" shouted Carter, overbearing with drink.

No one could make out. They were unable to pronounce the name of their "Taubada," as is usually the case with Papuans. They spoke very little English. One of them was able to explain, indistinctly, that their leader had gone on in front of them, and they had expected to find him at the store.

"Well, he ain't here," said Carter. "You go long house belong boy, you kill some tin meat, you cook tea. By and by he come."

It grew on towards evening: smoke began to rise from the cookhouses, and there was a sound of chopping wood. Rain piled up in the north-west, threatened, and came down. It became dark: the yellow-flamed hurricane lamps were lighted, and hung out in the verandah and store.

Mrs. Carter came out of Charmian's room at last. She was wiping her forehead with her handkerchief, and looked dishevelled and tired, but relieved.

"My word, Tim, I have had an afternoon!" she said. "Never came round till about half an hour ago, she didn't. I thought she was going to peg out, sure and certain. She seems all right now, and only thinks she fainted a little."

"Well, didn't she?" asked Carter, insinuating the corkscrew into a bottle of beer.

"If that's for the man you may go on with it.

If it's for yourself, put it back on the shelf: you've had enough," ordered the Queen.

Carter meekly put it back.

"Faint?" went on his wife. "No. Nor heart attack neither, so far as I can see. Looked to me more like something I've never seen in a white person—yet."

"What's that?"

"Well, you know how those niggers can die in half a day, without anything being the matter with them, if they happen to lose interest in life, and reckon it isn't good enough to go on?"

"Oh yes, I know that, same as everyone does."

"I'll swear," said Mrs. Carter, with some emotion, "if she hadn't been a white woman, I'd have been certain sure she was just going off like that. She's right now—more or less—and I'm going to make her eat some tea, if I have to choke it down her throat for her."

"Where's the gold?" asked Carter, with a suddenness that was one of his most astonishing characteristics. You would have thought him half asleep, as a general rule: but he waked up when least expected.

Mrs. Carter changed colour and stepped quickly back into the bedroom.

"Under the bed," she said, with a glance and a kick. "Tim, you gave me a turn."

"You ought to have a turn, old woman, leaving it there. Of course there isn't a digger on the field

would touch it, but these Kiwais are too fly altogether about gold: any one of them . . .”

“Lord Almighty!” said his wife, making a sudden dart outside the house into the fierce rain that was beating on the track—“if that isn’t Scott coming back, you may call me a Chow!”

CHAPTER XIV

THE track to Cripps' Reef—the new track that Anderson had marked out for Scott to follow on his way back—was already unmistakable to the eyes of any bushman. Coming down, Scott had gone mostly by compass, and by the lie of the Iri River, which, as it turned out, ran much nearer the Kikiramu, in the lower part of its course, than anyone had supposed. The men who went over the track sometime after him went by the footmarks of scores of carriers, by campfire ashes, by felled bush and torn-away vine, by rough log bridges newly thrown over unfordable rivers—by all the signs showing a road that has been passed over many times. For the rush had begun.

A very small rush, as yet—only the men from the claims around the Kikiramu store, and a few who had “come in” from the outer camps, after Scott's arrival. The news was even now going down the Kikiramu River in the *Dragon-Fly* launch, and before another three weeks had gone past, would be flying by the fortnightly mail-boat, and the Australian telegraph wires, south, east, and west, all over the great continent. About the same time it would filter through to the outback posts of civilisation in Papua itself, to the northern and north-

eastern divisions, and the isolated D'Entrecasteaux and Louisiades. Then the rest of the Papuan miners—a body of some three hundred in all—would come by steam-launch, cutter, or canoe: on foot through leech-infested forests, and alligator-haunted swamps, over huge ranges, choked with forest, where never white man's foot had trod, to the new El Dorado, as some of them had found their way in the old days, to the fever-smitten fields of Misima and Tagula: to the workings of the Yodda and Mambare country, inhabited by the fiercest race of cannibals in Papua: to the scarcely accessible Waria and Woodlark Island, and all the other fields, now mostly worked out, that had been discovered and exploited at the cost of many scores of lives.

Rupert Dence, coming down to the Kikiramu for reasons best known to himself, found the track as plain as a high-road, if scarce as easy. It was only a three-days' walk, by the newly marked out way—the prospectors' wanderings had taken them far away from the goal at first, and by the time they reached it, they had verged back within thirty miles or so of the Kikiramu field. If you crossed the alligator swamp—a reasonably safe thing to do in daylight—you could even manage the trip in two days and a half, with loaded boys. Dence took care to strike the swamp before sundown: he did not want to go round by way of an unnecessary range of mountains, and lose half a day . . . now.

As he had started in the middle of the night from

Cripps' Reef, it was the middle of the second day when he reached the spot where the new track to the Iri struck into the old track along the Kikiramu. There was a well-worn camping-ground here: trees had been cleared a little, and rough bush sheds for carriers had been built. Skeleton tent frames—the two pairs of gabled posts, the two horizontal side supports on four crotch sticks, which are so familiar a sight to camping folk—stood in the empty spaces. There was water, an elbow of a tributary stream, with a good gravelly bed. There were traces of fires everywhere, and bits of native baskets, and abandoned carrying-poles, and a stray emptied tin or two. The ground was leafy and boggy, and crossed with trunks of fallen trees.

“We'll kai-kai here,” said Dence to his head boy, picking out a log under the shade of a huge buttressed trunk. “Get water—make fire.”

The Papuan went down to the river, and the Englishman set himself upon the log, and lit his pipe. It was good to rest and smoke after the tramp of the morning. It was pleasant to watch the long clouds drift through clouds of trees, and see the sun make spangles of white fire upon the varnished leaves in the clearing—sheltered oneself by the age-old cloisters of the bordering forest.

There was time for a good long halt, and he took it, letting the boys prepare the midday rice and meat at their leisure. They brought him his dinner in a tin plate, and he ate it with the knife from his belt,

drinking milkless tea out of his metal pannikin. If you had seen him there, and known his history, you would have thought, perhaps, of the days when Rupert, not called Dence, had eaten off silver plate, and drunk vintage wines from engraved glasses; when he had had other service than that of brown naked men with red leaves in their hair. . . . But Rupert, called Dence, had well-nigh forgotten those days now: having moulded himself, like the rest of us, to the medium in which he lived.

He had pleasant thoughts as he sat and ate, and yet anxious ones, too. He frowned a little at his food, and often stopped, half-way through a mouthful, to consider. The head boy thought the rice was badly cooked, and trembled over his own dinner, for the soft-voiced Rupert had a heavy hand, on occasion.

. . . If one could divert the Taubada's mind to anything else there was, perhaps, a chance of escaping trouble. . . . If there were any game to point out—any traces of nomad tribes to find and make much of . . . anything—

The Papuan stopped eating, and sat still as a figure of wood, listening. Why, surely, there was something—feet advancing in the far distance . . . the faint, faint tread of a white man's boot, the far-away pad of bare soles . . .

"Taubada, one white man he come!" cried the boy, springing up.

"Some more of the men coming up," said Dence

to himself, and lifted a bladeful of rice. He watched the turn of the track before him without interest, until the white man at the head of the column of carriers came into sight. Then he jumped to his feet and uttered an exclamation. The turn was very near, and he had seen the expression on Scott's face. Hag-ridden, desperate, white, wearied with fierce exercise that had failed, after all, to ease the torment of his mind—the man's whole aspect spoke aloud of defeat and of pain.

It was only for a moment. He saw Dence almost as quickly as Dence saw him, and instantly the blind was drawn down, the bright, hard smile lit up like a lamp, the bent shoulders straightened. Scott, when he tramped into the clearing, and held out a hand to his mate, was Scott as everyone knew him: tired-looking, perhaps, but pleasant, cheerful, ready to talk and even to joke. You would not have supposed he had a care in the world, other than that of making good time, and getting up to his camping-ground at dusk—unless, maybe, you had been a woman, and had loved him. Or unless . . . you had been a man whose eyes were made keen by the mighty power of jealousy.

In the days of Samarai, which seemed so long ago, Dence had almost loved this man, and Scott assuredly had been drawn to him, as he was not drawn to any other man in Papua—not even to the fine nature and noble courage of Anderson, their leader. Now, the two met with pleasant words on their lips,

but the hate of hell itself in their hearts. The uppermost thought in each man's mind that moment was—"Does she care for him?"—and the undermost thought . . .

I think that neither Dence nor Scott knew what that thought was. But the savages who stood about them knew. And one from the Aird River country, where they kill men for pastime as a child might kill flies, began to chant a low, fierce song, and to cast devilish looks and laughs behind him at his comrades.

Meantime, the white men were talking.

"Only getting back now?" said Dence. "I thought I'd have met you a good deal farther out."

"Why, what's bringing you down, anyhow?" asked the other, speaking more lightly than he felt.

"Bringing me down?" replied Dence thoughtfully, as if he had been set a riddle. Then, brightly—"I'll think it over, and let you know as soon as I find out. Do you know, I was just wondering about that myself? Couldn't suggest anything, could you?"

This was insolence. Scott felt his blood warming up. For the moment he dared not trust himself to reply.

Dence seemed to draw new life from every line of Scott's worn face and body, as a vampire draws food from living veins.

"Had your kai-kai?" he asked, breaking into a

gay whistle as soon as the question left his lips, and staring about him in the forest.

"No," answered Scott.

"Have some?"

"No."

"Reef's pinchin' out, Anderson thinks. Hard luck for all the Johnnies who are comin' up now. What?"

"Is that why you left it?"

"No. I left it," explained Dence, smoking as he talked, and speaking very gently, "because I—as dear old Micawber would say—‘in short, chose.’"

The Aird River boys did not know English. There was a certain universal language that they did know, however, and they kicked each other with delighted anxiety. Were the Taubadas going to give them some fun?

Under the black shade of the great buttressed tree there was silence for a few seconds. The sea-like murmur of the forest grew very clear. You could hear the tinkling of the carriers' beads and necklaces as they breathed.

"The diggers have told him. . . . He is going to her. . . . She is alone—unhappy—afraid of Ducane. . . . She liked him before. . . . She will! She will do it! . . ."

"He has left her. . . . He is keeping faith with his Irish girl. . . . By God, it's my turn now! Charmian, Charmian!"

There was not a word spoken. The two men

looked at each other. And in that look the fate of three lives took shape.

Scott, remembering in the after years, knew that he had not thought at all, after seeing—what he saw—in Dence's eyes. He had only acted. Three thousand years of evolution shredded away from his mind as bark shreds from a tree before a lightning blast. He became as the naked savages who stood beside him. And the new (or was it the old?) Stone Age man in him laughed consumedly at the incomprehensible madness of rejection and sacrifice, so nearly committed by the fool, George Scott.

It was Scott as others knew him, however, who turned to the carriers with his usual kindliness of manner, and bade them open their food-bags and dine: who took meat and biscuit for himself, and sat down on a log to eat it, with the calm purpose of a man who had work to do, and means to neglect no aid towards the doing. Dence looked at him oddly. He could not understand this sudden silence, this ignoring of himself. He did not altogether like it.

"The poor devil can't bear to talk to me: he's so beastly jealous," was the solution that he tried to make himself accept. But it did not satisfy him.

He made a remark or two, as the meal went on. He was answered quietly: but conversation dropped, heavy as lead, into unfathomable silences. The boys finished their food. Dence cleared his tin plate. Scott broke the last piece of his biscuit.

"Well, I suppose we must be going," observed Dence.

The carriers hoisted up their loads again, and took leave of one another, with many strange cries of farewell. Dence beckoned his boys out on to the track.

"Well, so long!" he said, with the touch of swagger in his bearing that always made one listen, unconsciously, for the jingle of spurs. He held out his hand.

Scott did not take it, or return the salute.

"Out of friends, eh?" asked Dence, twisting his moustache. The idea did not seem to displease him.

"Not at all," replied Scott coolly. "I'm coming with you."

"*Coming with me?*" His face grew dark.

"Certainly. We ought to get in by six o'clock, without pressing the boys."

"And may one ask," said Dence, with more than a touch of insolence in his manner now, "the reason of this curious proceedin'?"

"Oh, yes, one may," answered Scott, smiling very pleasantly, "it's because I—'in short, choose.'"

No white man's tongue could tell—it is probable that no white man's brain could imagine—the disappointment that took possession of the Kiwais and Orokivas and Goari-Bari men as that strange afternoon wore on. They had been certain that the Tau-

badas were going to fight—possibly to kill one another with the desirable little six-throated guns that they wore in their waistbelts. They, the carriers, had smelt blood in the air, and were half-drunk on it already. . . . After these long months of unutterable ennui—eating and working all day, sleeping all night long with never so much as a midnight stabbing raid, or a skull smashed in with a pineapple stone club, to give a bored unlucky heathen a little taste of amusement—they really had had hopes that things were beginning to brighten. And now, there were the Taubadas walking one after the other, hour by hour, along the track, and up the steep knife-ridges, and through the riverbeds, exchanging no word, it was true, but never so much as reaching out to make a stab at a bare, sweating neck, or a jab into an unprotected back, between the shoulder-blades, with their knives! This, too, on a track that offered every facility for good, effective fighting, according to the standards of sensible folk—a road that furnished ambushes uncountable, drops and down-slides of unimaginable temptingness, and that never for a moment allowed two men to walk easily abreast!

There was still one hope left, and the boys discussed it eagerly among themselves as they padded on under the steamy shades of the forest. When the two white men saw the woman (no one who knows the Papuan will need to be told that the cause of the trouble was as plain to these simple savages as it

would have been to a whole drawing-room full of black coats and silk dresses)—when they saw the woman, there might be fun after all. The Orokivas, and the Goari-Baris, and the Yassi-Yassis, and the Kiwais, knew quite well, by experience, how exceedingly annoying it was, even to the best-tempered men, to have another man actually bothering round in the presence of the woman you happened to want yourself. All sorts of things were liable to happen in a case like that—even with a really good-natured man, who would not so much as roast a captive on a stick, alive, or bite off an enemy's nose. . . .

It began to rain at four o'clock, and kept hard on all the rest of the way. Dark came down soon after six: they climbed the heart-breaking height of the cliff more by feeling than by sight, and reached the summit winded, scratched, and bruised by a dozen falls. They had kept together, silent, throughout the afternoon, and they did not speak when the lights of the camp blinked into view through beating rain, some hundreds of feet below. On Scott had fallen the calmness of a resolution made for good and all. The new, strange man in him smiled quietly at the thought of the fool with the breaking heart who had climbed up that height in the silver of the early sun, rocks and valley ringing out into his ears:

“Good-bye to hope—good-bye, good-bye!”

He was breaking the most solemn promise of his life: he was jilting an innocent girl who loved and

trusted him: he was, in fine, a blackguard. Certainly: agreed: allowed. It didn't particularly matter. Nothing had mattered very much, since, in the forest clearing he had met that look on Rupert Dence's face, and had seen, in the sudden lightning blaze of prevision, Charmian with Rupert's lips on hers.

And Dence?

The stream of wild fury in his heart raged like the torrent of a mountain waterfall. So far the savages were right. So far had they read well that his hand had indeed been near the haft of his knife more than once during that silent march through the forest. Almost he had called out on Scott to halt—to draw his knife, or take his pistol from its holster, and see once for all which was the better man of these two who loved one woman. Only one thing held him back—the hideous knowledge that, in sober truth, there was nothing to fight about: no chance to stake. Scott held all the cards. Charmian loved him. She might marry another man—indeed, Dence told himself bitterly, she would marry a dozen times, if a dozen times set free, being in truth no more able to help herself than a little soft-eyed hare loosed among a pack of dogs—but the chance that he, and others, might have, would only come through Scott's defeat. And, save Scott himself, who was to defeat him?

So, sick at heart, and blind with rage, he followed Scott down the long staircase, scarce knowing

why he followed, but determined, all the same, not to leave him until . . .

What? That remained to be seen.

"Mrs. Ducane! Mrs. Ducane!"

There was something in Mrs. Carter's voice that snatched Charmian from her bed like a hand laid on her shoulders. Yet the pioneer woman had not even touched her. She had put her head inside the doorway of Charmian's room and spoken her name. And in an instant Charmian was out, and up, and . . . at the looking-glass.

Mrs. Carter burst out laughing, with a cry somewhere in the laugh.

"Yes!" she said. "He's there. He's back. Put up your hair, and pull down that blouse of yours. Doll yourself up as much as you like, and come out!"

She was gone. She took Tim by the ear and led him into the store and told him to stop there. Stray carriers were swept off the little side verandah like leaves before a storm. Miners wandering about were somehow conjured away. The leaf-thatched verandah, with its rough table and sapling floor, was empty of all save one white figure with a small, pale, glorified face, when Scott, big, ragged, mud-smeared, with eyes like grey Irish diamonds alight beneath his black-set brows, stepped out of the night and the rain.

"Charmian, I've come back," he said.

The pale ghost of the other woman, and the dark ghost of the spirit of Papua, faded away. . . . Charmian held out her hands to the man who was only hers. And the kiss that had haunted the waking and sleeping hours of Scott, from the coral shores of Samarai to the long reaches of the Iri River, through all the wonders of the unknown secret lands, through thirst and hunger and peril, and the spilling of blood, and the search for gold, was his at last.

A few seconds later Rupert Dence walked into the store, lifted a case of whiskey from one of the shelves like a feather, went out without a word of greeting, and plunged away down the lower log staircase into the dark.

As he went, several disappointed heathens crept out from under the house, where they had been eagerly watching the course of events, up to the moment when Rupert had turned away from the lighted oblong of the verandah doorway. Chanting their disgust and disillusionment in loud major thirds, they made their way to the cookhouse in the yard. If there were going to be no games, there would at least be bread.

CHAPTER XV

MR. AND MRS. CARTER were breakfasting.

After the rain the morning was magnificent. Sweet cold scents of orchid and jasmine rose up from the river valley. Beyond the treetops the mountain peaks stood out in facets of blue crystal against a sky of primrose-gold. The world, the unsoiled, unhandled world of the virgin forests, was new and pure.

"Tim, it's a fine morning," observed Mrs. Carter over her plate of cold boiled cassowary. "And that girl loafing over her tea in bed. . . . Ah! I've no patience with girls—they're a rabbit-headed crew, all the lot."

"You took her her tea," observed Carter, out of his own cup.

"Had to: she's fair shook up. But she's no business to be. That's what I quarrel with. Nerves! If I'd caught a daughter of mine havin' such a thing about her——"

"I reckon they knew better," said Carter impersonally.

"And, as you can bear witness yourself, there wasn't one of the six performed like that, wedding-day or no wedding-day. Up they were, as bright as bees, baking——"

“Wedding-day?” Carter interrupted, with small ceremony, the amazing entomological parallel just commenced by his wife. “Whose wedding-day is it?”

“Scott’s and hers, of course,” replied Mrs. Carter calmly. “I wasn’t going to stand no nonsense, so I told them both last night, when I saw they’d done canoodling on the verandah. There’s the *Dragon-Fly* due to leave the landing the day after to-morrow, and there’ll not be more than time to send off a notice of the wedding, if it goes to-day with the carriers. They’ve muddled about this job long enough: time it was settled for good and all. I must say Scott was very reasonable: he said he had no objection in the world, and sent a message to the warden right off. He’s coming up some time before lunch to marry them, and he’s lending them his house into the bargain. As for that girl, she cried, and told me—had the face to tell me—she oughtn’t to marry him, because of some nonsense about another woman. Said she was making him act against his conscience: he’d never mentioned the other girl to her, but she was sure of it, all the same. And she yesterday morning breaking her heart because he hadn’t left the other! I declare, Tim, my patience just pinched right out, and I said to her: ‘You get to bed quick and lively, and if I hear any more yap about not marrying, my girl, I vow I’ll smack you!’ Off she went like a lamb: but she’s all nerves this morning, and says she’s wicked. Wicked? Trash!

I'm going in to help her to doll up by and by, and then I reckon we'll hear no more about wickedness. I've got a nice muslin dress that I brought up to make for Mary's girl: it'll do her all right, with a tuck or so—and, by the way, Tim, just you send one of the boys down to the warden's house for a bit of that orange blossom he has."

"Widows don't wear orange blossom," objected Tim.

"Widows? She ain't a widow: she's only got rid of a bad bargain, and she'll be married like a regular decent bride, or my name isn't Ann Carter. Did you ever hear of any law against a divorced woman marrying in white and orange blossom?"

"Only widows," allowed Tim perplexedly.

"Well, then, send that boy off, and sort up the store: all the men that aren't away by one o'clock will be there, so we'll want room to stand."

"What about that parcel of gold?" asked Tim.

"Man, you're like a bluebottle fly. I tell you it's all right. I saw it—and kicked it—this morning. Where d'you think we are? In a back alley of Melbourne, or up on the Kikiramu? If it was lying on the counter of the store, instead of under her bed, there isn't a man here who would touch it."

"Well, old woman," maintained Carter, with the curious persistence that he could show at times, "I'm not saying anything against anyone, but I don't see what we've got an expensive safe for, that

near killed three carriers out of ten, on the way up, if it isn't to put gold in, when gold's in the house."

"I suppose you're right: you do seem to be right, once in a way," allowed his wife grudgingly. "She's dressing now: I'll give her this muslin, and as soon as she's out of her room, I'll get you the gold. Now you go and see to having the store swept."

To Charmian, being a beautiful woman, even the signs of sleeplessness and nervous strain were not altogether unbecoming. Any ordinary woman would have looked plain, with black shadows under her eyes, drooping mouth, and colourless cheeks. But under Charmian's lovely eyes the dark stain of fatigue looked like an Eastern beauty's touch of kohl: the paleness of her pearl-white face seemed designed to make the lips look redder: the very droop of the mouth invited kisses. When she had finished dressing, and taken a long look in the glass, there was scarce a shadow left of the nervousness that had aroused good Mrs. Carter's wrath. Charmian loved her own beauty too well not to know all its different phases, and she saw at once that her looks to-day had touched their zenith. More, surely more! There was something added—a perfume to the flower, a sun-ray to the jewel. She had never looked so in all her life before.

Knowing this, she felt suddenly and completely happy. What if she were luring Scott away from the shadowy woman to whom (she guessed) he had

given faith! Look what she was giving him! She was so beautiful!

She put on the white laced muslin that Mrs. Carter had given her, and spent a delicious half-hour adjusting and arranging it, and fastening in her hair the cluster of orange blossom brought her by Carter's messenger. She knew it was all wrong, this white dress, these bridal flowers, for her, Grant Ducane's discarded wife: but that troubled her little. The only thing that mattered was that her looks should be brought to the highest point of perfection possible. Was not George Scott giving up his best prospects in life to marry her, with her stained name, and his honour, to free himself for her? The value for which he had bartered these things should be as high as possible: it was her business to see to that.

When she came out on to the verandah there was no one there. The miners—some ten or fifteen, who were waiting for the arrival of provisions from the landing-place, to make a start for Cripps' Reef—had gone off to tidy themselves up: Razors were at a premium in the camp, ties urgently demanded, and the bitter remonstrance of one or another, unlawfully bereft of hoarded clean shirt or "flash" new belt, sounded among the outbuildings of the store. Scott, with characteristic energy, was getting his train of carriers in shape to start: they were to get away for Cripps' Reef as early as possible, loaded with the food that Anderson required, in

charge of a miner who had secured his own provisions and boys, and would start that day. Mrs. Carter was in the cookhouse, making her boys fly round as she began the concoction of a wedding breakfast out of the few supplies procurable. For the moment there was peace and quiet in the camp, and Charmian was glad of it as she dropped on to a long canvas chair, and shut her eyes, to rest.

Being tired after her restless night, she half dropped off to sleep. She heard a bustle in her room by and by, people moving about, somebody talking, somebody else hushing him or her. She did not pay any attention—there was only one thing in the world that mattered to-day.

Feet began to sound about the house—heavily booted feet that came from many quarters, and met together somewhere about the doorway of the store. The talking in the bedroom was drowned by the increasing hum outside. It swelled to a shout, by and by, and voices could be heard raised in loud greeting to Phillips, the magistrate and warden, who was evidently coming up the lower series of ladders, from his bungalow across the valley.

Charmian jumped up and went to the rail . . . Phillips, the gay young fellow with curly hair whom she had seen in the store on the night of Scott's arrival, was almost at the top of the stairs: he wore a white suit—a thing seldom seen on the Kikiramu—and a newly pipe-clayed helmet: and his snowy shoes made it plain to the eyes of all present that he

had carried a pair with him, and put them on at the last flight of the muddy ascent from the river.

The miners, Micky and Bobby and Jack and Dick, and German Billy, and Cortland, and Otto Riddick, and the rest, were all round the doorway of the store, waiting. They had managed to find clean shirts and trousers, and to fasten pins in the place of missing buttons, and every man who did not wear a beard was shaved. They looked a rough crew and a mixed one—there were men among them who had taken university degrees, and others who could barely write a dozen words of an ungrammatical letter: there were men who drank themselves half to death once or twice a year, and men who were strictly sober: men who were lads when gold was first found in Australia, and men who remembered nothing older than the Boer War . . . men who . . .

“That is it,” said Charmian to herself, pausing on the constant repetition of one word—“they are lots of different things, but they are all—men. Most men aren’t.”

She became conscious that something was dragging. There was a delay: a pause. Where was Scott? The magistrate had gone into the store: the miners were following. She waited for him to fetch her. What was keeping him?

Nothing much, apparently: he was coming now—she could hear him hurrying along the verandah from the Carters’ room. He arrived almost out of

breath, glowing and gay as became a bridegroom, dressed in a white suit exactly like the magistrate's, and evidently borrowed from him. He had a white orchid in his buttonhole: his hair was brushed smartly, and he trod as though the floor were india-rubber.

"You're to take my arm," he laughed, "and I'm to lead you into the store, and you're not to dare to be nervous, and you're to speak up and be sensible. That's what Her Majesty the Queen of North-West Island says. Come, Charmian! Isn't it a lark, getting married!"

He took her by the arm, and ran her along the verandah: they entered the store at a gallop, Charmian laughing, blushing, and remonstrating; Scott with a flush on his face, and shine in his eyes, and a gaiety about his whole demeanour that made him look almost as though he had drunk of some stimulant more earthly than the pure wine of happiness. But most of the people in the store had seen men married before,—some few had even been married themselves,—and they were not slow to recognise a well-known variety of bridegroom's nervousness. As for Charmian, who had been crying with agitation and doubt only an hour or two before, she was, and looked, as calm as the still lagoons of the Coral Sea.

The magistrate married them, and Mrs. Carter, stepping forward, gave the bride a hearty kiss, almost before the last words were well pronounced.

"Good luck, my girl!" she said.

"Good luck!" echoed shadowy Tim, taking the bridegroom's hand.

"Good luck! Good luck!" shouted the miners, pressing round and shaking hands freely. They raised a cheer for Scott, and a cheer for his bride, and shouted themselves nearly hoarse. And then big Mike, the man who was the recognised leader of the Kikiramu field, suddenly produced a bag made of white moleskin, and tied up closely at the mouth, and handed it to Charmian.

"Just a little present, to show our goodwill," he said. Letting go the bag as if it were red-hot, he turned tail and bolted out of the store, followed by all the other men, who instantly assumed the demeanour of criminals fleeing from a crime.

"Hand over, you'll drop it!" ordered Mrs. Carter, taking the bag from Charmian's fingers. "Tim, there's a good twenty ounces in that!"

"Oh, George, how can we take it?" remonstrated Charmian, tears in her eyes. "From those few men—when we've so much—all that great parcel of gold—and most of them haven't done anything like so well!"

Scott looked rather odd for a moment, and then burst out laughing, somewhat over-loudly.

"Don't let that turn your hair grey, sweetheart," he said. "We'll have to take it, anyhow. They would never forgive us if we didn't."

"Well, will you give them our thanks—our very,

very best thanks?" asked Charmian of Mrs. Carter.

"I will, certainly," said the Queen, with her queenliest manner.

"And I'll take the gold off of you this minute, and lock it up," said the unexpected Carter, grabbing at the bag and disappearing like a vision.

The breakfast was over: the miners (who had come back after all) were dispersing.

"Time we started on our wedding-tour: put on your hat, Charmian," suggested the bridegroom.

While the bride was absent in her room, the three in the store (Carter having returned) put their heads together and talked. Charmian caught a word or two as she came in again.

"Don't tell her," was what she heard.

"Of course not," answered Scott. Then he turned to meet her, and gave her his arm, and together they went down the track leading to the log ladder, and the flumes and the riverbed, and the little bungalow house away alone in the forest.

"Tui! Tui! O-tui O!" sang the happy bird in the valley, calling to its love.

Above, in the store, there was trouble.

While Charmian was dozing on the verandah, waiting for the wedding-party to assemble, Mrs. Carter had gone into her room, intending to take away the small, weighty parcel of gold that had lain underneath the bed for a day and a night, and put it

in the safe. She stooped down and put her hands round it. It did not come up; it seemed appallingly heavy. She gave another tug and another heave, and now it lifted with a vengeance, ripping something as it came away, and sending her staggering back against the wall.

She knew in an instant what had happened. This was no soft, creaking parcel of gold-dust that she held in her hands: it was a hard, irregular bundle of metal, roughly sewn up, and not half as heavy as it ought to have been. A bit of fishing line passed through the floor, and a rip in the canvas of the parcel, told her why it had not rolled away when she kicked it, once and again, to feel that it was there.

Strong woman though she was, she felt sick at the greatness of the disaster. Three thousand pounds gone at a stroke! And in her house! Much she feared, too, that it was her own fault for neglecting to have the gold put away in the safe.

She tore open the canvas, and out dropped a number of tomahawk heads, falling on the bed with a thump.

The eye of Mrs. Carter lightened ominously.

"This is no native's work!" she said. "I don't know who's the skunk we've got in camp, but if once the men catch him . . ."

She paused, on a long stride doorwards, with the ripped canvas in her hand. She hung irresolute for a moment, then laid the stuff down, and walked quietly

out to the back, where Tim was packing his swag ready for the afternoon.

"Here!" she said. "Something's happened—but keep it quiet till the wedding's over: no use upsetting her again."

"It's the gold," said Tim instantly.

Mrs. Carter swallowed in her throat.

"It is. I suppose now you'll be crying, 'I told you so,' for the rest of your natural. You may as well be right once in a lifetime, for fear people might forget you'd any sense at all." She was greatly agitated: her neck worked under the low collar of her dress, and her breath came quick.

Tim finished the task of ramming down a pair of boots on the top of a flannel shirt.

"Well," he said, straightening himself, "who done it? When did it go?"

"It's well to be you, that can take it like as if it was a thruppenny bit disappearing off of a collection plate in church!" said Mrs. Carter scornfully. "It was a white man stole it, and none of your Kiwais. When I went to lift the parcel, there was nothing but a lot of old tomahawk heads sewed up in the canvas, and tied to the floor, so that it wouldn't roll away when I kicked it."

Carter fastened up the top of his swag and went into the bedroom, followed by his wife. He pulled out the bed, and examined the stick floor.

"Look at that," he said, lifting half a dozen of the saplings that had been cut away from the rest

by the simple process of severing their lashings of bark fibre. "There's how he done it. He was standing under the house in the dark, and seen you carrying the parcel about, and got it when she was asleep at night, most likely."

"Who got it?" asked Mrs. Carter irritably. "You'd make a flash detective, wouldn't you?"

"No use performing about it," commented Carter. "We're trying to find out who. When did you bring it to me to weigh—about midday yesterday, wasn't it?"

"Yes, about—talk quietly, man, or she'll hear you outside there."

"Then she took ill, and you was working over her all afternoon and half the evening. And the men was all over the place, buying stores, and having drinks, and annoying of me to tell them when there'd be more stores up by the *Dragon-Fly*, which I didn't know, no more than a dead Kiwai. And——"

"You needn't say it was Mike, or Riddick, or any one of the lot; it just isn't in them, and no one knows that better than you," declared Mrs. Carter in a fierce whisper.

"I didn't say it was anyone, but we've got to think about it, seeing it was our house it was lost in," maintained Carter. "I'm going on about yesterday. . . . Then them carriers that belonged to nobody came in——"

He stopped suddenly.

"Ah!" said his wife sharply. "One of those boys——"

"It wasn't any boy," persisted Carter. "It——"

"If it wasn't, they know something about it, and I'll have it out of them, or knock their blooming heads off!" declared Mrs. Carter in the same fierce whisper. In a moment she was gone.

Carter sat down and employed himself cutting up stick tobacco in the palm of his hand. His face was devoid of all expression, but he listened. By and by, from the yard at the back, there came the howl of a frightened native, and the sound of Mrs. Carter's voice raised in rapid and threatening speech. Afterwards was silence.

She came back like a human whirlwind, and dragged her husband away into their own room, panting.

"Tim that—that——" She could hardly speak. "The cook——"

"You mean the feller that came up from Samarai, and went off prospecting after?"

"Yes! It was his carriers—he came down from Cripps' Reef a day or two after Scott, and got in just at sundown, before those boys—yesterday! No one saw him come in, and the boys think he got bushed somewhere or other. Bushed? No fear—he got in here when the lamps was lit, and saw you and me with the gold. And he sneaked under the house after, and cut the lashings of the floor, and took the swag through and emptied it, and put that

iron in, and—and—my God, Tim, if I had him here I'd cut the hide off of him! ”

“ I've no doubt you would, old woman,” agreed Carter soothingly, “ but that don't do us any good now. My oath, I never liked the fellow, and there was some yarn about his having been chucked out of the store he was in, in Samarai, for stealing. He's got it, all right. He's off to catch the *Dragon-Fly* with it, too, I'll lay, but he won't, because I'll send one of them Yassi-Yassi boys after him, to take a letter to the ingineer.”

“ You don't savvy any more than a Yassi-Yassi boy yourself.” Mrs. Carter was recovering her spirits with the prospect of regained superiority over her husband. “ What do you think he'd want, going down by the launch, with you and me ready to stop him the minute it was found out? No fear. He'll hide himself a bit, and then get a canoe somewhere, or make a raft, and go down the Kikiramu by himself. It's risky, but the feller that carried off that swag won't stop at . . . ”

“ What's the matter now? ”

“ You wait.” The whirlwind blew itself out into the yard again, with a frightful fluttering of incensed petticoats, reversed its course, and blew itself back. Mrs. Carter, out of breath, dropped into a chair.

“ I knew it! ” she panted. “ One of the boys is missing.”

“ Missing? ” Carter had finished cutting up his

tobacco, and was packing it into his pipe with his little finger-tip. "Where is he?"

"If I knew that, I'd know where that little serpent, Clay, was. I just remembered that the gold weighed over fifty pounds, avoirdupois, and that a man loaded with that couldn't carry his tucker, unless he was a sight more of a man than that—two-faced centipede was. I asked if they was all there, and the boys says no, there was one of them come in with the rest, but he strayed off somewhere, about dark, when it was raining a lot, and they never saw him again. Of course, like natives, they didn't think it good enough to mention such a trifle till they was asked!"

She gasped and fanned herself for a minute or two, Carter meantime stolidly smoking. The miners were gathering in the yard outside for the wedding, and Scott's footsteps sounded, coming in.

"We've got to tell him," sighed Mrs. Carter.

"You tell him, old woman," said Carter placidly. "He'll be proper vexed."

The Queen went out with a somewhat heavy step, and returned by and by.

"He was a bit cut up," she said, frowning at the world in general. "He wouldn't allow it was our faults: said it was hers, and he thought he could manage to forgive her that much, specially to-day. She's not to be told, now or any time, he says: he thinks they'll get back the gold all right, and, anyhow, she isn't to be bothered. Bothered? He don't

know much. She'll never bother. Some women would want to know what had become of a parcel of that kind if they didn't see it about, but she won't never think about it again, now she's going to get him: she'll just take it for granted he has it. I've no patience with her—never had—she's as silly as they make them, which, I suppose, is why all the men in New Guinea is half mad about her!"

Tim, declining to be drawn into a controversy on the cause of attraction between the sexes, sucked at his pipe.

"Once the wedding's over," said Mrs. Carter, "we'll tell all the men, and rake the matter right to the bottom. But there can't be no upsetting things now."

"No, old woman, so put your best bonnet on and come," suggested her smaller half. "The warden's on the way."

And the wedding, as we have told, took place.

CHAPTER XVI

THERE was a brown house in the forest. Its thatch was brown sago-palm leaf. Its walls were peeled brown sapling, set close, and laced together with strings of brown bark fibre. Its floors were brown sago-palm sheath, hard and slippery, and springy to the foot. The doorway was closed with curtains of brown sail-cloth. Through the chinks among the saplings and the palm-sheaths light sifted softly, amber-coloured and dim. The gabled pitch of the roof, high above the branch-woven partitions of the rooms, was almost dark.

It was a house of dreams. There was no sound there but the soft pouring of a little waterfall away in the green of the forest. There was no light but the honey-coloured glow that came through half-transparent walls. There was nothing beyond—no world, no thunder of great cities, no murder nor unrest. Sea upon sea, river upon river, range upon range, the remotenesses, mysteries, obstacles of the unknown lands rose round the little cottage and cloistered it in.

You could hear your own thoughts in this small brown house that lay clasped like a nut in the great green hands of the forest. You could loose the

orchestra of your strangest fancies, and listen to the wild Valkyrie-ride they made, beneath the umber gloom of the gabled roof that had never echoed to any sound but that of the leaves, and the rain, and the waterfall. You could lie in the stream of cool air between the doors, and sleep softly, with the scented breeze of the forest pouring over your face, so that you might dream of secret islands and strange, uncharted seas, and wonderful, unvisited valleys, and magic cities hid among remote dim mountain peaks. . . . The winds of the Never-Never can work strange wizardry on sleep-loosed brains: who knows the wild countries knows this.

It was a house of dreams, and of a dream—the dream that lies deep hid in lovers' hearts, of some exquisite secret place, shut from the world, with leaves and water and the song of birds about it: a little place, fit to hold the happiness that is so much too great for palaces. And in the little secret house, Charmian and George, hand-fast at length, were living through that which not one life in twenty thousand knows—a dream come true.

She was more beautiful than he had thought. She was dearer than he had ever imagined. He told her so many times a day—the hard-bitten Bel-fastman, who buried his emotions as men bury their dead, beneath a face of stone. He told her everything in his life. He told her secrets that were those of other people, just as all the world's best and greatest men have told the things they should

not tell, to the one only woman. He told her that he would die for her, and that no man had ever loved as he did: and the outworn words seemed made anew for him as he spoke them.

He saw the sunrise and the sunset with her, and the miracle-play of the thunderstorm; and all these things were new created, here in the forest, for her and him.

As for Charmian, the woman made for love, she spoke but little. No well-informed, capable, lecture-nourished woman in the world but would have felt a fine contempt for her conversation, for her lack of interest in serious matters, for the lazy way in which she lay about the little brown house, singing a little, reading a little poetry, dreaming a great deal. She seemed to have sponged out past and future from her existence; she never spoke of either. Heart and soul, she had minted herself into a single coin, and flung it royally upon the board of life. The game was played.

In the very midst of his new unbelievable happiness that thought struck coldly upon Scott. It shut the future from his mind too. He could not picture the years ahead. He did not know what was to come after. Beyond the brown house in the forest—and a darkly looming separation, when he must go back to the Iri—and a vague thought of a return to civilisation, somehow, some day—he could see nothing.

He told all this to Charmian, of course, and she

laughed at him, and got up from her lounge to dance in a streak of sun on the sagging palm-sheath floor. She whistled lightly for herself as she danced: no bird in the forest fluted so sweet and true. She stopped whistling to laugh, and stopped laughing to dance again, her hair flying loose as she swung from foot to foot. She seemed the very spirit of the passing hour.

"You dear fool, don't try to wake," was all she would say. "You might wake me. Keep the dream."

"But, Charmian——" Scott began.

Charmian was singing now, in a very soft and sweet soprano:

"I hold within my hand
Grains of the golden sand. . . .
Ah, why can I not grasp
Them with a tighter clasp?
Ah, why can I not save
One from the pitiless wave?
All that we see or seem
Is but a dream within a dream . . ."

"Where did you get that?" asked Scott, struck by the wild, sweet air and strange words.

"It's an old, old song. A poem of Edgar Allan Poe's, I think."

She had sunk down on the floor now, with all her soft white draperies billowing round her, and was sitting with her chin propped on her folded hands. A lance of the westering sun stabbed through her

fleecy hair, and turned it to nets and webs of gold.

"I don't want to wake," she said, her amber eyes set on something very far away. "I shall wake some day, and then . . ."

"What then?" asked Scott, drawing a lock of the beautiful hair through his hand.

"I . . . don't . . . know," said Charmian slowly. Her eyes grew dark, and she turned to hide her face in his arms.

"Take care of me!" she said, with a little shiver. "The world makes me afraid."

Since they came to the little brown house—he scarcely knew whether it was a week, or a year ago—Scott had written a letter and received one.

The letter he wrote was penned with his very heart's blood. It was to Janie, and it told her that he was false to her.

The cold airs of the North blew on his face as he wrote. He tasted the salt tang of the breeze from Belfast Lough: he saw the purple profile of Cave Hill, lying like a giant asleep above the roaring, many-windowed mills. He smelt the odour of crushed grass along the tow-path of the Lagan, where Janie and he had walked. He heard the grinding cringe of the train as it rounded the curve leading into the station of Portrush, where Janie spent her holidays, and where he used to run down to see her. . . . The very names of the stations rang in his head like bells. Ballymena—a long way off:

one smoked, and read, and looked at one's watch. Glarryford—one was coming near her now. Ballymoney—only three stations—she would be putting on her things and leaving the house. Coleraine—one got eager and excited now, and could not keep still: the train seemed to scream with joy as it rushed out under the bridge. Portstewart—oh, the look of the little copse by the rails, and the bending trees, that began to feel the push of the wild sea-wind! and the sheer delight of having to give up one's ticket, and know that it was done with, and that one was all but there! Then the last seven-minutes' run that was so long, and the strong, pure breath of the Atlantic beating in at the window, and the blue, blue sea above the green shadows, and the last swinging curve of the railway round to the bridge, and the little grey, sandy, windy town lying down below . . . and now one ran smoothly, shutting off speed, along the inward platform, with one's head thrust as far out of the window as it would go—and there, with her still, sweet face scanning the rows of carriage doors . . .

Something choked in Scott's throat. Never, never again! . . .

The fiery green of the forest, seen through the open door, swam like an emerald sea before his eyes. He set down the pen for a moment, and looked back at sleeping Charmian, where she lay upon her long deck-lounge, beyond all telling fair.

To pay for one's happiness with one's own pain—

that was a feather-stroke. But to pay with Janie's. . . .

Scott took up his pen again, and with tightened lips wrote himself down—untrue.

He did not offer to send her half his fortune, though he would have been glad indeed to be allowed this much relief. He knew that no power on earth would ever make Janie take a farthing from his hands. She would post him back his ring, and return his letters: perhaps without even a word—that would be like Janie. She would sell the few things she had collected to help with the furnishing of their home. She would wear out the pretty things she was gathering for her trousseau—another girl might hoard them or give them away, but Janie would wear them with her teeth set, and defy herself to care. She would remain in her school, and go on teaching. There would never be anyone in his place. He would never go home to Ireland again: if he died, she would not hear of it, and when the little burying-ground above the windy White Rock Road unclosed its gates to take in the woman who was to have slept by his side, in death and in life—he would not know.

So—that was ended: the letter was written, signed, and closed. To-morrow a boy would take it away, down to the landing-place, to await the next run of the steam-launch down the river. The bullet would have sped on its twelve-thousand-mile course, to find its deadly end in a woman's heart.

The letter he received was from Anderson.

Dence had brought it down with him, but no one had heard anything about it for several days, because the messenger was lying drunk in his camp by the river, a case of whiskey at his side. Carter had gone away up the Iri with all the other men on the Kikiramu; the *Dragon-Fly* provisions had come at last, and not a miner would stay on the field an instant after the food arrived, with such an El Dorado as Cripps' Reef within three-days' march. Mrs. Carter, left alone in a deserted valley with a few house-boys, had gone down to see how Dence was faring, found him on the verge of delirium tremens, and had him carried up to the store, where, helped by the natives, she tended him with the matter-of-fact kindness of the bush. She discovered the letter in his clothes, and sent it down to Scott. It ran as follows:—

“DEAR GEORGE,—I have been working hard at the reef, with all the boys to help me, and Dence until to-day, when he leaves, I do not know what for. I am sorry to tell you it shows signs of pinching out, but we have done well, and have not much cause for complaint. Only I am sorry for the men who will come up here by and by and have their trouble for their pains. We followed down and worked out the shoot of gold for about thirty feet, and it was gradually getting smaller and wedge-shaped, and in another eight feet pinched to a vein about eight inches wide. I think there is a chance of its making again, but it is only a chance, and we have certainly

got the best out of it. It will pay us to keep on at it a few months longer, I daresay, but there is not going to be much for anyone else. You might show this to any men who come up while you are down. It will not stop them coming, but they may as well know what to expect. As Dence will tell you, Clay started for the store a day before he did. There was no need to keep him once you had got down to file our claim. He prospected about to see if there was anything for him to take up, but could not find a colour, so he goes back as poor as he came. There are eight of the men from the Kikiramu here now, all that could get tucker from Carter, but so far none of them have found anything, and they are chewing the rag about it above a bit. They brought some news from the Kikiramu; it seems you have ladies there now. Well, I don't want to hurry you, but when you get back I will not be sorry, for this reef is taking some work, and Dence might not return for some time. I suppose you will send the tucker up in any case. Look after your swag; I don't know that you did well in taking it down so soon.—I remain, yours sincerely,

“JOHN ANDERSON.”

Scott read the letter alone in the little living-room of the hut. Charmian had taken one of her rare fits of housewifely energy, and was out in the kitchen teaching the boy how to make tinned-oyster patties, which she knew very little about herself. There was nobody near: the waterfall rustled pleasantly in the distance, and a wet-smelling breeze blew in at the door.

He frowned a little over the last sentence. If

Dence had only remembered to give him the letter! Knowing Anderson as he did, he would have been sure that the man who wasted no words, and said what he meant, had not put in that last sentence merely to fill up the sheet. One would have been on one's guard, whereas now . . .

There was another eight hundred ounces of his up in the camp by Cripps' Reef: he was glad he had not brought that down. The other men's shares were there, too. Anderson meant to take down the gold under his own supervision later on. He must have seen or heard something that made him distrust Clay's sudden departure: hence the warning. If it had only come in time!

Well, it seemed that the gold was gone for good. He had had a message or two from the miners before they left for the Iri, telling him of the efforts that had been made to find the thief. Men and boys had scoured the bush in all directions: messages had been sent down to the landing-stage to warn the engineer of the *Dragon-Fly* against taking Clay on board. Nothing had been heard, seen, or guessed of him. He seemed to have vanished off the face of the earth.

Some of the men believed that he had had nothing to do with the gold at all, and that he had simply got bushed on the way down, and met his death from hunger, or that he had been taken by an alligator when crossing a stream. Most of the miners swam or waded across alligator-infested rivers with

absolute callousness. They reckoned, they said, that the brutes would not touch them: and the brutes did not,—generally,—which was quite good enough for a New Guinea miner. But Clay might have got into a river in the dark, when everyone knows that the chance of disaster is infinitely increased. Or he might have been picked off from the bush by some of the Kariva bowmen. Or again—the most popular theory of all—he might be sneaking down the Iri in a native canoe with the missing carrier, camping in quiet spots at night, and keeping a good lookout for the *Dragon-Fly* in order to avoid her. That would be easily done. He could dodge into the bush on the banks when he heard the sound of her engine, leaving nothing for anyone to see but an ordinary canoe tied up to the bank, apparently in waiting for some painted and feathered owner who had gone off spearing pig. One might pass him a dozen times and never know it.

The party that believed the gold had been taken by some shrewd Fly River native, and buried to await the termination of the thief's indentures, grew stronger as time went on. Clay seemed to be lost. The *Dragon-Fly* engineer had seen nothing of him: the natives had no news. Some chance there might be of eventually getting back the gold, if the thief tried to carry it off all in one swag, but the miners thought that a Kiwai would have sense enough to know that he ought to split it up. For the present, at all events, there seemed no hope.

One afternoon, Mrs. Carter, who thought that the honeymoon seclusion had lasted long enough, appeared at the little brown house.

Charmian was delighted, and ran down the steps to welcome Mrs. Carter, who looking older than usual, and a little tired, stalked along the verandah, with all her usual dignity, and entered the sitting-room with that effect of a ship in full sail that always seemed to distinguish her comings and goings. She was rather elaborately attired, for the Kikiramu, in a grey tea-gown, well pinned up over her stout boots, and she wore her best hat and her best manners.

"So your husband's out," she said, scanning the rough furniture as though she thought Scott might be hidden under a canvas chair, or at the back of a packing-case sideboard.

"Yes; he went to see if he couldn't shoot a young wallaby for dinner to-morrow," answered the bride.

"And so you've cried for the moon and got it. Well, my girl, that's more than most women do," observed Mrs. Carter composedly, unpinning her dress as she sat. "Hitting it off all right?"

"Yes," answered Charmian simply. She had the gift, rare in a nervous century, of sitting perfectly still. You could not have seen the light waver on her hair as she leaned back in her deck-lounge, hands folded and eyes looking quietly out to the leaves and the sun.

"We'll be grass-widows together soon, you and I," went on the other. "Scott will go back in a

few days, I suppose. Tim's gone this week and more. I'm stopping to look after what's left of the store: the men are just as likely as not to come back by and by. I reckon you'd better come up to me when he goes: I'll be glad of your company. I did reckon to give Tim a bit of my society just now, but——"

She bit down a sigh and fanned herself rapidly.

"I'm sorry. I can't stay with you," said Charmian, "but I'm going with George."

"*Going with George?*" repeated Mrs. Carter in strong italics. "Is George out of his mind, or are you?"

"I suppose I am," answered Charmian coolly. "He isn't. He doesn't know about it yet: he thinks I'm going down to Port Moresby."

"And you mean to go up with him?"

"Yes."

"Well!" Mrs. Carter, for once, seemed speechless.

"I've no doubt," said Charmian, "there are lots of things to say against it—all about the road, and the natives, and the gold rush, and so on. Of course he'll say them. But I sha'n't mind. I'll just go on saying that I mean to go, till he gets tired. Then I will go. That's all."

"You're changed," said Mrs. Carter, after a silence. "Time was, not so long ago, you'd do anything anybody told you, and never raise a cheep."

"I suppose I would still," answered the other, uninterestedly. "It's just this one thing."

"And what's stiffened your back so about that?" asked Mrs. Carter.

"I don't know. I don't want to be always thinking. There's something warns me . . . tells me . . . Oh, I don't know. Let me make you some tea."

"I don't mind: it's hot walking," agreed Mrs. Carter. When Charmian came back she returned for a moment to the charge.

"Look here, my girl, don't you think you'd better give it best about the Iri, and stop on here with me?"

"Yes, I'd better," replied Charmian, pouring out the tea. She paused, with a cup in her hand.

"I'd better—but I'm going, all the same," she said.

CHAPTER XVII

IN the Iri valley the rush had come and had gone.

Three months before the little piece of flat country by the riverside had been a humming town—here, in the unknown heart of New Guinea, days and days up the Kikiramu in the launch, days and days and days more up the terrible track to the Iri. There had been hundreds of adventurers wound about the spot where the golden reef had been found—shopmen and lumberers, and dentists, and horse-dealers, and West Australian miners, and Queensland “cocky” farmers, and broken down remittance men and A.B.’s from coasting steamers, and actors, and labourers, and bank clerks. They had found their way to Port Moresby, almost penniless, in many cases: they had disregarded all the warnings issued by a Government old in experience of Papuan gold rushes, and once more, as in eighty-nine, and ninety-five, the cruel country had taken its deadly toll.

In the capital they had camped on the wet ground under Government offices and hotels, slinging rough hammocks to the supporting piles of the houses, and living anyhow, as best they could, till the overcrowded launches and schooners could take them

down the stormy coast. They had done without mosquito nets, they had drunk to keep away malaria, they had eaten the little township bare of food, and had to subsist on the refuse of the sold-out stores. They had got away at last, without carriers, without proper tents or provisions, determined to show that a white man could "hump his swag" here, as well as in Australia. . . . And they had paid: the golden Minotaur had had his meal of flesh. On the long track up from the Kikiramu they had lain down, not to rise again. They left low, stoneless graves in the bush, by the road to the Iri. They had turned and crept back half-way, cursing the cruel country and the deadly lure of gold. They had reached the field, wrecks of men, and found their stock of money done, fever gripping them hard, and gold in paying quantity as unattainable as in the depths of the Coral Sea. There was nothing on the Iri River for any man to find, save a poor sprinkling of alluvial stuff scarce worth working. The three discoverers had taken all.

Here and there the forest had been feebly cut into, as a man might cut himself with a penknife into a load of hay. Rough tent-flies, stretched above platforms of sticks, rose by scores in the little clearings: bush houses, made of poles and brushwood, stood about the verges of the reward claim owned by the discoverers. The clink of billy-cans sounded down by the tea-green river: thin pillars of smoke spired up out of the tops of the forest, in a hun-

dred different places. Of nights, in Carter's make-shift store, there was drinking and card-playing, and fighting too at times. But, for the most part, the field kept a dispirited silence: you would never have thought that some hundreds of adventurers from all corners of Australia were scattered like deep-water crustacea here at the bottom of the forest sea.

Fever, that the old hands knew and could fight, attacked the defenceless newcomers without mercy. They lay sick in their tents and huts by the score: some rose to walk abroad again, and one or two were carried forth, to rise no more. Then came the inevitable scourge of a New Guinea mining rush—dysentery—and the camp became a hospital. The Government sent up a doctor, new-caught from Melbourne schools: and, in the midst of several hundred native carriers, and some scores of whites, down with the disease, he did the work of ten men, helped by the old hands among the New Guinea miners, who had nearly all escaped. . . . There were two hundred graves of poor black boys, and twenty or thirty of whites, away in the green silence of the bush, before that last worst wave of ill was spent.

Now it was over. The Iri rush, cruellest of all the cruel rushes that have darkened the annals of New Guinea, was done. More men had been killed by the Yodda: the Waria had set worse difficulties in the way of prospectors. But there had never before been such bitter and universal disappointment.

One or two of the old New Guinea hands had found gold—mere traces: not enough to pay the expenses of their boys. Of the shopmen and lumberers, and dentists, and horse-dealers, and farmers, and sailors, and labourers, and bank clerks, scarce one had found as much as a single colour.

The old hands stayed on for a while: where so much had been found there was always the chance—for an experienced miner—of striking the golden reef again. But the outsiders fled. As fast as the few available launches and schooners could take them down the river and the coast, they went, broken and disappointed men, cursing the name of New Guinea. And on the way the country took its toll again. In the edges of the unknown forest, by the Iri and Kikiramu tracks, there were more dark, nameless mounds before the broken men won home.

It was never known—it will never be known till the day when all things are made plain—how much the silent, hard-faced miner folk of the older fields helped these weaker souls who had come to New Guinea in defiance of all warning, destitute of experience or means, and cast themselves as a burden upon the country. Carter, the store-keeper, made little out of the rush, for his heart was too soft to refuse a penniless creature food. But he could not cope with the misery and destitution of an entire township unaided. And so it was that gold, which was never found in the valley of the Iri, made its

way into the pockets of men who could not have discovered it, had it been lying in the earth within a yard of their feet.

The discoverers themselves were nobly generous to those who needed help; yet even so it was hard for the unsuccessful ones to watch work going on in the reward claim—to hear the boom of dynamite, and the thud of picks, and the steady pounding of sledges, as Anderson, Scott, and their boys worked the golden reef; to guess, with bitter envy, how much was being taken out, and to know that a fortune sufficient to place each one of the owners beyond want for the rest of his life had already been won. In any other country than New Guinea there might have been trouble over the matter, but the warden, with his native police at his back, and the Government doctor, and the officials from Port Moresby, who came all the way up to the field to inspect it and see that everything was being done fairly and in order, created an impression of power and civilisation that had its effect on the most lawless. It was known that one of the discoverers had been robbed of a sum that grew in value the oftener it was talked about: and it was also known that the thief had never been caught, though several months had gone by. Still, everyone knew that he had not got away with the gold, whatever had happened: and the imaginary picture of Clay, hiding and starving among native villages somewhere down in the Gulf, while he looked for a stray sailing ves-

sel, deprived his crime of all glory that success might have shed upon it.

No one among the newcomers knew why the third owner of the golden reef did not stay up on the Iri and help in the working of his property. He was on the Kikiramu field, living in an abandoned camp, and drinking more than was good for him. A number of Kikiramu miners had already returned to their old haunts, so that he was not without companionship. But the newcomers thought it strange that he did not care to work his claim. The others, it was understood, were getting a percentage of his gold in return for doing his work.

There was no mystery to the old hands of the Kikiramu in Rupert's behaviour: but they did not think it good for outsiders to know more than was necessary about the affairs of that very close corporation, the miners of Papua. For themselves, they knew quite well that the presence of Mrs. Scott on the Iri River field was enough to keep Rupert Dence away had the valley been paved with gold.

No one thought she ought to have been there. A new rough goldfield is no place for a woman: more especially for a gently bred lady. And the horrors of the dysentery epidemic had made Cripps' Reef, more than ever, a spot to which no bridegroom would willingly have brought his bride. But there had been no choice in the matter.

Charmian had refused to stay behind.

With a soft yet steady persistence that seemed

utterly alien to her character, she had not combated but slipped away from all Scott's reasons, entreaties, commands. She must go, she said. Yes, it was true that the track was a terrible one—but she had come up the Kikiramu track already, and that was almost as bad. Yes, the field would be a very rough place: yes, it would be exceedingly remote from civilisation—food, lodging, surroundings would be worse than at the Kikiramu, and Mrs. Carter would not be there to keep her company. Yes, she quite understood all Mr. Anderson said (for Anderson, too, had joined in the chorus of disapproval, and tried to shake her resolution), and she was sure Mr. Anderson knew more about New Guinea fields than even her husband. They were all very good to trouble so much about her, and she knew all they said was true. But . . .

“Charmian, I won't take you—it comes to that,” declared Scott at last.

The woman set her small hands very tightly together and drew a long breath. They were all against her, these men. Always men were against women, when it came to the things that mattered. And behind the men was something greater than they—the darkling, cruel spirit of Papua.

. . . “A queen, with ruddy lips and large black eyes,
Brow-bound with burning gold.”

They should not win. Papua should not win. The lure of the gold should not win. Nothing

should take him from her. He did not know what she knew, and would not tell him. But . . . there should be no parting now.

"I'm sorry," she replied breathlessly, to Scott's last words. "I'm sorry." She panted a little as she spoke, as if she had been running. "Because it would be so dreadful—and I should be so frightened—going up alone."

There was a silence, and then—

"Oh, Charmian!" from Scott. His voice had a hidden laugh in it somewhere: there was reproof, and there was surrender. Anderson (he had come down to the Kikiramu with a load of gold, leaving his claim with a friend) passed his hand over his long beard and turned away to hide a smile.

"You naughty, naughty girl!" said Mrs. Carter.

But among them all they let her go.

Scott built the best house for her that had ever been seen on a New Guinea goldfield. It had two rooms, and a verandah all round, and the stick walls were lined with costly unbleached calico, so that they were quite untransparent. It had chairs, wonderfully made of split bamboo from a huge feathery grove that stood just behind the house: it had a table, put together from inestimable pieces of flat packing-case—the only sawn boards within three-weeks' journey. Rustic baskets of the forest ferns (unknown and unnamed, some of them, and worth their weight in gold to a collector), and of pink and yellow and ice-white orchids, were hung from the

low roof of the verandah. The house was half a mile removed from the camp: it stood high above the green-glass reaches of the river, and behind it and about it was the bush. If you went for a walk, you came at once into the unbroken forest, where you might creep a mile an hour: see the light from above fall white on the unmoving leaves: smell the rotting red and blue forest fruits that no one ate, and hear, far away, through the stillness, the horse-like tramp-tramp of a cassowary's running feet.

Scott forbade her, with some sternness, to go near the camp, and she obeyed. She obeyed him in everything now. When the dysentery epidemic broke out, and she was preparing herself to go to the field hospital, as a matter of course, and help the doctor, Scott told her to remain at home, and she remained, without a word. When he stopped her from going to the edge of the river for flowers, lest an alligator might stray out on the bank, she went no more, and did without her little bouquet for the table. She lived in the house that he had built for her, and never seemed to know what went on beyond it, save for the talk of Scott's own friends, Anderson, Brabant, the Government doctor, and some of the old Papuan miners whom he used to bring in of an evening. When the men from Australia were all gone away, and the camp was left to the miners who had come from the Yodda and Kikiramu, Scott relaxed somewhat his rule, and told her she might walk about in the neighbourhood of the reef if she cared and see

them at work. But she seemed, now, to have little liking for anything beyond her house. There she occupied herself, while her husband was away, in making her own clothes and mending his: contriving pretty decorations from the ferns and creepers from the bush, brought in by the native labourers: singing a little, reading a little, dreaming alone, by the verandah-rail overlooking the glass-green river, for long, long hours.

Scott was happy. In spite of the bitter smart waked by the thought of Janie (she had taken his letter in utter silence, though there was now more than time for a reply), in spite of the wretchedness and disappointment that overshadowed the Iri field, in spite of the fact that Dence, the man he had made his friend, was loafing aimlessly about the Kikiramu, hopeless and helpless—the world was good. He did not look before or after. Charmian was his; she loved him, and he loved her. They had their little home above the still Iri River, with the silent forests all about. He had work to occupy mind and body all day: he was adding to his hoard of yellow flaky gold, hidden safely away in a nook of the house specially built to conceal it, and the loss of that eight hundred ounces was being steadily made up. It was true, as Anderson had predicted, that the reef was “pinching out”: true that the yield was, almost daily, less and less. But there was still enough to keep them at work for some months: and when all that could be won was won, they could sell the reef

for a good sum down in Samarai, or Port Moresby, or Sydney, to anyone who would care to take the risk of bringing up machinery. A company could, doubtless, squeeze something more out of the fruit when they, by their primitive methods, should have sucked it and flung it away.

In the evening hours of this strange isolated place, that felt as far away from cities and from civilisation as Uranus or Neptune, the house above the river became a magnet to all Scott's friends. Charmian rose in the wilderness, was the only reminder to these lonely men that such things as wives and homes existed, in countries far away—that beautiful women still lived and laughed and wiled men's hearts away, somewhere beyond the gloomy forest lands. Just to hear her soft woman's voice—just to see her brown-gold head bent over a piece of sewing, under the light of the hurricane lamp, with the circle of her light-coloured skirt flowing out on the floor—sent a man back to his mildewed, damp-smelling tent with a heart that sank less low than usual when the night pressed down upon the forest and the rain began to thunder in the dark. . . .

Camp is well enough in the daytime: the green things are friendly, round about your open door: the birds flirt and flutter sociably: the river talks to you. But with the going of the sun your friends go too. Out of the darks of the forest creeps your night-side mind, to keep you company, as the drowned wife of the legend crept forth from the depths of

the sea to clasp her dank, cold arms about her living lord. . . . Your fire is out, your boys are sleeping. You lie among the shadows, as you will lie among the endless shadows some day soon: the anchor chain of your tenuous life drags, frail as a spider's thread, upon the feeble holding-ground that skirts the Unknown Sea. So, looking into the heart of life and death, you learn why men of the wilderness know no fear. By one wind or another the ship will take the deep. What does it matter whether to-morrow or to-day?

Brabant, the doctor, could not understand why Mrs. Scott disliked him.

He was a little in love with her: not very much, for he had a girl-wife and two babies down in Melbourne, and was just as fond of them as an honest young Australian can be—but he was assuredly interested in the beautiful, rather silent girl that George Scott had married: and he did not like being neglected by her.

She certainly did neglect him. His camp was farther away than Anderson's: Anderson often came in to spend the evening with the Scotts, and when Brabant arrived he was sure to find all three laughing and talking sociably on the verandah. . . . Then, with his own coming, something like a shadow would fall upon the party. Mrs. Scott would drop silent, produce cards for the men, and slip away to a quiet corner with her sewing, watching them while

they played, but speaking scarce at all. Before long she would have vanished indoors: the boy would bring out supper, and no one would see any more of the lady of the house. Scott was always ready to "yarn" with him, and Anderson was sociably disposed, for the most part: neither, he thought, had observed Mrs. Scott's apparent dislike of himself. Sometimes, if he spoke to her, she would start as though she were frightened, and look up at him with large eyes, dark in the dusk of the verandah, and half-parted lips. . . . What was it that made her avoid and fear him? Brabant, young, pleasant, and popular with women, could not guess.

He had not been long in New Guinea, and was one of those unfortunates who are especially susceptible to the poison of malaria. In his riverside camp the deadly anopheles mosquitoes held high revel at nights: and Brabant, with his fresh Southern blood, was a tempting victim. He had fever again and again: pulled himself through, with the aid of Anderson, and got about his work among the sick native carriers almost sooner than was prudent. He found, with a little flutter of gratified vanity, that Mrs. Scott was really troubled about his health, whether she liked himself or not: she used to ask most kindly after his condition, when he came to the house, and even begged him not to overwork. One day she brought out a small case of meat-juice, and pressed it on his acceptance, with polite and

kindly words. Brabant was glad of it. There were few luxuries in the camp, and he knew that Scott had no particular use for the meat-juice—but could not for the life of him understand why Mrs. Scott, who always seemed to shrink away from him, should give him that, or anything else.

“She’s got some feminine dislike or other to me,” he agreed with himself. “There’s no accounting for the whimsies of their nervous systems. And she’s naturally kind-hearted, and tries to overcome it. Well, I’m the better by a case of Oxil, anyhow. ‘That is something,’ as Hans Andersen would say.

“But I wonder,” he said to himself. “I wonder why . . .”

One morning he met Mrs. Scott alone beyond the house, taking a short walk on the top of the river cliff. And suddenly he knew.

She knew that he knew. She came towards him with hands stretched out and honey-brown eyes opened wide.

“Oh, don’t—don’t tell!” she exclaimed—and burst into tears.

Brabant found himself holding her little hands, grown suddenly cold, and comforting her like a crying child.

“No, no,” he said soothingly, the physician all awake. “Of course not: but you mustn’t cry. And why——”

“Oh,” cried Charmian, “I was so afraid—I

thought you would make him send me away. And I can't leave him."

"Why?" asked Brabant, feeling for the moment that he was wading in deep waters. Little Mrs. Brabant had not taken the idea of his going up to Papua in such high-tragedy fashion. But she was a sensible small body, whereas this passion-flower of womanhood——

Charmian was not crying now. She was looking out over the tops of the forest sea, on the other side of the river—away to the blue mysterious domes of the far main range, where no man's foot had trod.

"I'm not good—at talking," she said slowly. "I feel things—I can't say them very well. It's just—that—something tells me. I don't know what it is, but it's stronger than I am."

Brabant, with his physician instinct, kept silent, to let her have her say out.

"It's been all—like a dream," she went on. "It's like a dream still. The strange, wild country—and the storms—and the sunsets like the Judgment Day—and the sweet, sweet scents that get into your brain—and those dark shadowy faces of the natives, flitting—and the far-awayness. I'm afraid all the time—of waking up. It makes one . . . cling."

"But, my dear lady——" began Brabant.

"Yes, I know," interrupted Charmian. "You'd all have talked and worried till—— Now you can't. I can stay with him."

"Well," said Brabant, dropping down to earth

determinedly, "it's a jolly good thing for you that the Government didn't take me away. And now you'll have to be sensible. Let your husband know at once—take care of yourself—and take all the advice I give you. You'll be all right, never fear."

"I don't. I only care . . . to stay," said Charmian.

Brabant saw her back to the house above the river.

There were no visitors that evening. The husband and wife sat alone. They had much to say. Yet, in all that they said, the future held small part. It was as though the wilderness had enmeshed them body and soul, shutting away even their thoughts from the outer world, as the rivers, and the forests, and the ranges, and the stormy coral seas shut the common lot and life of common man away from Papua.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE Kikiramu was awake again. Brown, naked carriers, bearing fifty and sixty pound loads on their backs, tripped lightly up and down the great log stairway. Smoke rose among the treetops. The distant hack-hack of clearing-knives and axes came up from the valley to the store in the still blue hours of noon. The store was going again: its outhouses were taxed to put up the crowd of carriers needed for the work of supplying the camp, and its verandah and bar were never empty of buying, lounging, smoking men. Claims had changed hands on the Kikiramu, as they generally do when a big rush carries away the miners in a body, leaving a whole camp to the deliberate choosing of those who remain behind or return early. But the personnel of the field was the same, save for the addition of one or two outsiders who had stayed over the rush, and the absence of a well-known face here and there. One had gone down to Melbourne with a "good shammy" of gold to have a spree: one had given up digging and taken to plantation managing, away East: Anderson was still at the all but deserted Iri field, working out the last of Cripps' Reef with Scott. The old hands mostly lived as they had lived before

the delusive rainbow of Cripps' gold rose on the horizon—making enough for comfort and content, with no dazzling views of fortune.

Mrs. Carter was still at the store. She had stayed a good while this time, and people were beginning to wonder how North-West Island was getting on without its sovereign. But the Queen remained where she was. She meant to go up to Cripps' Reef before very long: by and by would be time enough to talk of returning to her kingdom.

News, as usual, circulated from the store round about the camps in the bush whenever the lazy *Dragon-Fly* crawled up the river and lay a day or two before coming back—rumours from Port Moresby, scandal from Samarai, strange happenings from the D'Entrecasteaux and Louisiades. A tale of a traveller came, one voyage, to cause delight and amusement among those who could cross the t's and dot the i's. The traveller's name was Ducane, and he had turned up by the *Matunga* (some weeks later than he was expected) to look for the lady once known as Mrs. Ducane. No one had been able to tell him where she was gone: there was a general impression to the effect that she had got away on the Norddeutscher Lloyd steamer, but some supposed she might be in North-West Island since Mrs. Carter's schooner had sailed back thither on the day when Charmian was last seen in Samarai. Ducane, who had succeeded in making himself thoroughly unpopular during the few days of his stay

in the island town, found little help or encouragement in his search: but he had plenty of money, and spent it liberally, so that a pearling Greek from the Trobriands was moved to offer him his cutter and his services in looking for the missing lady. They went and looked in North-West Island, about the Calvados Chain, in Misima and Woodlark and Rossel, and might have been looking yet (since the Greek was paid by the day) had not news come down at last by the *Cora Lynn* to tell of the wedding up on the Kikiramu field. At this, it seemed, Ducane was like a madman, and wanted to go up to the Kikiramu himself, being sure that the story was a lie: only, by and by, when the leisurely mails had been sorted and delivered, the resident magistrate of Samarai produced a certificate of marriage, made out by the resident and warden of the Kikiramu field, and directed to "Grant Ducane," under care of the Samarai official. Whereupon Ducane, looking white and beaten, and ten years older, had secured a launch, gone down the coast to Port Moresby, and steamed away out of sight and remembrance, on the Dutch company's liner *Van Linschoten*.

Then there were rumours about Clay—how somebody had seen him down in Brisbane cleaning boots in a back-street hotel: how others declared he had never got down the Kikiramu River, but had been caught by the natives: how others yet were sure that he had been seen on the P. & O. *Macedonia*, as she

was leaving Sydney, gorgeously clad, and rejoicing in the possession of a royal suite of cabins. . . . And there was talk about Scott and Anderson, how much they had gained, how soon they would come down—and about Brabant, who had apparently been forgotten by the Government, now that the rush was over, and was occupying himself making a collection of leaf-insects and butterflies, likely to be worth some hundreds of pounds when he had completed it.

Rupert Dence, wandering about the bush, smoking, talking, and generally idling, seemed to have got over the effects of his late violent bout of drink, and returned to something very like his former self. He was exceedingly restless, however; he would not go down to Port Moresby, or up to Cripps' Reef: he could not work his old claim, as it had lapsed when he left it: he could not take up a new one, as he held all that the law allowed him, up at the Iri. Much of his time, therefore, was spent in a sort of aimless prospecting about the neighbourhood of the camps: he did not seem to care for distant journeys. Often he came up to the store, lingered long over the few purchases he had to make, and looked at Mrs. Carter with eyes that spoke things unintelligible to the heavy mind of her husband, though clear enough to her. She always managed, on such occasions, to mention the arrival of any carriers from any outside place, and the news they might have brought, or failed to bring.

At last, one day, when Rupert called at the store, he saw the capable mistress of the place making preparations for departure. Swags were being taken out and packed: tins and bags selected from the store. Mrs. Carter stood on the verandah, directing and commanding. Carter skulked in the shadows, feeling his beard. He had a vaguely regretful look.

"Off to port?" asked Dence carelessly, leaning an arm on the rail.

"Bless you, no," said Mrs. Carter. "I'm off to Cripps' Reef to-morrow at daylight. It's full time I was there now: I'd have started a fortnight ago, only that I got a leechbite on my foot that inflamed and knocked me up for bush walking. You, Gibi! look out with that tin of flour: don't put it on top of the wine-bottles. Get a pull on the cord: haul him tight—lively! That one finish: you put him long verandah."

"Who's taking you up?" asked Dence.

"Well, that's the question just now," replied Mrs. Carter, making a hawk-like dart into the pile of goods on the floor. "Where 'nother fellow bottle kerosine he stop? You no gammon me! Go catch him, quick, that bottle! My word, by and by I cut the hide off of you!"

"You see," she went on, "German Harry's got fever—he was going—and I can't leave the store without anyone, so Tim's got to stay. I think I'll ask Mike. He's not doing much on his claim."

"What about me?" demanded Dence, looking at her with a face devoid of all expression.

"You?" Mrs. Carter turned, her hands on her hips, her Elizabethan eye fixed hard and keen. "I thought you wasn't set on going up to the Iri, anyhow."

"Don't know that it matters what you've been thinkin'. I'll go. I know every inch of the way. I'd—rather."

"Very well." Mrs. Carter turned back to her pile of goods. "You be here at half-past five tomorrow, sharp. Don't fool. And—I'm obliged to you, Mr. Dence."

Much had been done to improve the way to the Iri field since first the discoverers tracked it out. Rivers had been spanned by logs or by liana suspension bridges. Swamps had been "corduroyed" in the worst places. Bush huts had been put up at the usual camping-grounds. Nevertheless, it was a terrible road, and Mrs. Carter, not so young as she had been, was fain to cut some of the longer marches in two. It happened that she did this just before reaching the alligator swamp: and, the latter part of the way proving easy, they found themselves arrived at the height above the swamp as early as four in the afternoon.

Dence opined that it was too late to begin the crossing now: they might be caught by the dusk. In daylight, experience had proved that there was little

or no danger in crossing the swamp. True, a carrier or so had been taken by the alligators during the time of the rush, but these had simply courted disaster by leaving the corduroy path and going off into the swamp after crabs. Since the frequent coming and going across had ceased, these last few months, the alligators had evidently increased in numbers: men camping on either side at night had been kept awake by the bellowing of the brutes down in the mud and slime below. Still, in daylight, and with common care, there was no risk to speak of.

So Dence explained to Mrs. Carter as that determined lady was stirring up the carriers to unpack the swags needed for the night. Mrs. Carter did not pay much attention to him. She seemed to have something on her mind.

"I wish," she said, when the dusk had come and the fire was lit and they were sitting on a log to sup, with the warm, wet-scented forest close about them, and the bell-birds tank-tanking under the stars—"I wish I could have made better time of it. I reckoned on being there before now."

She tilted her tin pannikin of tea and drained it: she was not tired, after the short day's walk, but she was thirsty, for the night promised to be sultry and still.

Dence made no reply: he was sitting huddled up on the log, chewing his moustache. He had been very silent all day.

The boys took the plates away, unfastened the

sacks of bedding, and slung the mosquito nets under the roof of the open bush-house. It grew darker: the stars were hidden behind purple clouds.

"Where 'nother lantern stop?" called Mrs. Carter impatiently. It seemed as though "bush nerves" were abroad that night.

"Sinuabada (lady), altogether he pinish," quavered the boy she addressed.

"Finished? What d'ye mean?"

"He pall down along big river."

"Fell in the river? Fell in the river? You wait till we get in to-morrow, and I'll talk to you, you black bushman! Fell in the river?"

The native fled, trembling lest the promised "talk" should take place there and then. Mrs. Carter, slapping at the mosquitoes, remarked, in an aggravated voice, that it seemed likely to rain. Dence said nothing. He sat looking out into the illimitable bush, silent, chewing his moustache. His face seemed white in the dim light of the single hurricane lantern.

"There!" said Mrs. Carter at last, killing a mosquito with a smack that almost overbalanced her. "I'm full up with this. Dence, you may think to hide your head under a bushel" (Mrs. Carter's Biblical knowledge was growing rusty), "but you don't take me in. Good God, man, why are you spoiling your life over another man's wife like this? How many lives do you reckon you've got to throw away?"

"She's not spoilin' it," answered Dence, in a monotonous tone. "That's a job I did myself, and did thoroughly, fifteen years ago."

"You can keep your own secrets, I reckon," said Mrs. Carter keenly. "There's not a man in the Territory knows anything about you, except what they've seen."

"And not a man will," came the answer. Rough, degraded, broken as he was, there seemed a certain dignity about Dence to-night. He was no favourite of Mrs. Carter's, but for the moment she could see what it was in him that had made Anderson, the strongest character on the goldfields, choose him for his "mate," and had won the affection of the cool, fastidious Scott.

"Well, however that may be, I say you're a fool to go on caring for Charmian Scott. Forget her, man! The world's full of women; and if you only knew it, one of us is pretty much as good as another."

Rupert Dence made no reply: he was saying something to himself that sounded like poetry:

"Dark grows the valley, more and more forgetting,
So were it with me, could forgetfulness be willed.
Tell the running river that feeds the bubbling well-head,
Tell it to forget the source that keeps it filled."

"Oh, poetry!" said Mrs. Carter contemptuously. "The world isn't poetry."

"Not for you," answered Dence, looking at her

with the mocking expression that always irritated her. It made her feel that, after all, she didn't matter very much: worse, that she was a woman. . . . Mrs. Carter did not like to be made to feel that she was a woman.

She drove home a stab of plain truth, as hard as she could, in return.

"Mrs. Scott never cared a brass pin about you. She'll care less when she's got her baby."

Rupert was not listening to her. He was sitting with his elbows on his knees, and his chin in his hands, looking into the black-blue gloom beyond the circle of the lamp. A night-moth, big as a bird, swept into the light and out again, like a human soul flitting from dark to dark.

"Buck up, and look cheerful, if you can," commanded Mrs. Carter irritably. "You're not much of a mate to go through the bush with, I don't think."

She fanned herself jerkily with her handkerchief: the night was breathlessly warm. Rain could not be far away: the stars were surely fainter. . . . Why could she not walk as she had walked ten years ago? She could have kept pace with almost any man in Papua—then. Why could she not have got farther on her way? There was no knowing whether . . .

"Oh, talk, can't you!" she snapped. The boys were feeding round about their fly: one heard the clink of their spoons on the tin plates, and the low babble of a dozen different languages. Someone

was relating something exciting: the others jerked interested comment.

"I don't feel like talking," answered Rupert, without taking his head out of his hands. "I'll recite to keep the blue devils off, for both of us."

"Recite away," agreed Mrs. Carter. Rupert's recitations were famous all over the Territory, but it was seldom indeed that anyone could prevail on him to give one, unless he happened to be in the mood. The Queen, in her heart, hated poetry: but she hoped his choice might be prose.

It was not. It was Lindsay Gordon's "Sick Stockrider." He began sitting, his head half bent down: but before long the poem gripped him, and he rose to his feet, and recited as he had never in his life recited before. The boys, frightened at first, became fascinated, and crowded round him, leaving the remains of their supper to the ants and iguanas. Mrs. Carter sat breathless, looking at his lit-up face, and feeling, without quite understanding, the swing of the lines. Rupert had a wonderful singing voice: and he used it almost to equal effect in speaking when he chose. The Queen was wiping her eyes and catching her breath before long: poetry was rubbish, but it did sound heart-breaking! . . .

Rupert was nearing the end: his voice, clear as silver, sank like a fountain falling slowly back to its source. The lean, shabby figure in the worn khaki clothes, the hawk-like, high-bred face stood out in the circle of lamplight: behind was the dark.

"I've had my share of pastime, and I've done my share of toil,
And life is short—the longest life a span,
I care not now to tarry for the corn or for the oil,
Or the wine that maketh glad the heart of man;
For good undone, and gifts misspent, and resolutions vain,
'Tis somewhat late to trouble—this I know,
I should live the same life over if I had to live again,
And the chances are—I go where most men go!"

"Taubada!" said an excited voice among the boys. Someone came forward, apparently pushed from behind.

Rupert stopped: the flame in his blue eyes went out. He unclenched his hands and looked at them oddly, as though they belonged to someone else.

"How I have been gassin'!" he said. He addressed the boy like one waking up from a dream.

"Well, what do you want?"

"Me boy belong Missi Kotti."

"One of Scott's boys, are you, by Jove! When did you come, and what do you want?"

"Me been come close-up sun he pinish (near sunset). Me gottum letter."

"Letter?" Dence's face changed. "Why didn't you give it before?"

"Me talk alonga boy."

"Confound you! Give it here! What do you mean by—— Mrs. Carter, it's for you!"

Mrs. Carter had sprung to her feet and snatched it out of his hand almost before he spoke. Bending over to catch the light of the lantern she read it, and

passed it to Dence. Then she sat down on the log and burst into tears.

"Oh, my God, why aren't I ten years younger!" she said, rocking on her seat. "Why wasn't I here day before yesterday!"

Rupert had read the note in a flash. It was from Scott—a blot-spattered scrawl, scarce legible:

"For God's sake come on as quick as you can, wherever this meets you. Brabant is down with black-water fever, delirious. I think Charmian is ill. For God's sake come. I have sent a carrying-chair with the boys. Drive them all you can. Anderson can't leave Brabant—he is very bad. Make haste, for God's sake.

"GEORGE SCOTT."

Dence dropped the letter on the ground and pulled Mrs. Carter to her feet with a jerk.

"Are you game to cross to-night?" he said, his breath coming quick.

"Game? What do you take me for? Do you think all the gold in the country would keep me here?" demanded Mrs. Carter, sobbing loudly.

"Cross? I should think so!"

"Do you know the risk?" asked Rupert gently.

"There's alligators, ain't there?"

As if in reply to the question a long, moaning bellow came from below, answered by another. It was a grisly sound—here in the forest, in the night.

Mrs. Carter listened to it, her face setting hard. She stopped crying, and wiped her eyes dry.

"Where's those boys of Scott's?" she demanded.

"Sinuabada (lady)—he stop along 'nother side."

"Other side—and, anyhow, not one of them would cross in the dark, if you drove them with bayonets. I reckon ours won't either."

"Suppose you come alonga we-fellow, I give you plenty kuku (tobacco)," suggested Dence to the head boy.

"Where me go?"

"Alonga 'nother side."

The boy's eyes dilated till they showed a white ring all round the dark-brown iris.

"You gammon, Taubada!" he panted.

"No gammon. Suppose some boy he come, to-night, I give him five pounds money."

The carriers drew back and huddled together, their faces showing mortal fear. Another snarling moan came up from the swamp.

"Hear him, Taubada!" trembled the carrier.

"Me too much dam fright. Me no go."

"Dence, leave them alone," came from Mrs. Carter. She had just finished pinning up her dress, and was rapidly snicking cartridge after cartridge into the 45 Colt she had taken from one of the swags. "They won't go, and I don't know as it's a square deal to try and make them."

"The risk is worse for you," said Dence.

"It's got to be taken. They haven't any call to throw away their lives, and I reckon they won't, anyhow. We'll have a lantern apiece——"

She broke off.

"That fool of a boy—there's only one!"

It was beginning to rain, a fitful dropping that promised the usual nightly downpour before long. Dence pulled a couple of brands from the fire and tried to make them burn. But they hissed and went out as the fall grew heavier.

"You'll have to go first," said Dencé, turning away from the useless fire, "and carry the lantern. They're more or less afraid of light."

"I reckon I know about as much of them as you do. And what's to become of yourself?" asked Mrs. Carter. She had girded up her dress now, and stuck the revolver in her loosened belt: her keen, handsome face looked much as usual, save for a slight paleness under the tan, scarcely perceptible in the lamplight.

"I'll keep as close as I can. And look here——"

"Well?"

"If anything should happen to me—don't you fool trying to do anything. Go on. You must get through."

Mrs. Carter looked at him. There was nothing that she could say.

For some unexplained reason they turned and gripped one another's hands before starting down the slope to the marsh, whither they were followed by the loud howlings of their boys. A peculiar, booming cry rose up as they went, dominating all the other shrieks—the Orokiva death-song.

"For delicate tact and consideration of your feelin's the Papuan takes some beatin'," observed Rupert dryly.

They were at the borders of the swamp now: the huge marsh-ferns rose up and brushed their faces as they passed: and the stiff spikes of the water-loving sago-palm swung low above them. It was raining hard and very dark: the hurricane lantern showed only a low circle of muddy track and rank lush grasses, poisonously green.

And suddenly, as though a tap had been turned on, a flood of sickening scent filled the air. It was warm and animal: it smelt of musk and of decay. It was so thick that you felt you could beat it apart with your hands. There was no sound now at all. The bellowing had ceased.

The track went down into the marsh here: there was no more solid ground in front, only a glimmer of mud and water, with scaly sago trunks and clumps of giant spear-grass looming dimly in the dark. Underfoot a narrow path of felled trees, laid lengthwise for economy's sake, stretched out into the gloom.

The man and the woman stood for a moment on the brink of the swamp, while the rain pattered in the pools and hissed on the lantern. There was still no sound. The darkness was thick as a wall. Only the stifling musky scent, with its hideous suggestion of a perfumed corpse, grew denser, in waves that could be perceived.

"God defend us, Mr. Dence," said Mrs. Carter, in a low voice, "but I think they're all around." Her hand on his arm gripped him so tight as to bruise.

"Will you go back and wait till to-morrow?" asked Rupert, in the same low tone. His eyes, blue fire in the lantern-light, pleading, commanding, gave the lie to his tongue.

Mrs. Carter loosened the pistol in her belt.

"No," she said. Rupert could see that her nostrils were beating like a heart. She took the lantern from him and stepped out on the felled-log track.

Just for an instant Rupert paused behind her. In the dank heat of the night something like a wave of cold air, a waft from an unseen wing, seemed to pass over his face.

"Purely subjective," he said to himself. But as he set foot on the logs, taking what they both well knew to be the post of danger in the rear, his hand fluttered for a moment in the darkness, making, on brow and breast, a sign that had not rested there for many a year . . . the sign of the Cross.

It was almost an hour's journey across the swamp, in the night and the rain, with the uncertain footing given by the slippery logs. The circle of lantern-light showed only the perilous track and the oily glitter of mud and water close beside it. Twice a droning call came from far away: once the sound rose suddenly at their feet, and seemed to shake the

logs on which they stood, while the musky smell beat up in a warm wave into their very nostrils. Rupert fired his revolver at the sound, but there was no splash or movement, and nothing to be seen. They went on. Neither spoke. The logs tilted and creaked beneath them as they crept along, and their feet sucked loud in the gaps between: the lantern clinked as it swung: their breathing sounded.

They were near the other side.

"O God in heaven!" cried Mrs. Carter.

The roughly laid logs swayed down and tilted: mud and water flowed over one side of the track. A huge grey head, with cold impassive eyes, had risen like a phantom of death from the slime, opening a gulf of white-toothed jaw. The body of the creature, invisible under mud, bore down the logs as though a dray-horse had rested its weight on them.

Mrs. Carter, shrieking, dashed her lantern at the horrible head: she had not time to reach for her pistol. Somehow, in the momentary withdrawal of the creature, she got past, on the sound half of the track. Then, behind her, came a shot, a struggle, and a splash—no cry.

She flung round again, rushed back, pulling out her revolver, and fired shot after shot into the darkness. . . . Rupert Dence was gone. Sobbing with horror, she saw the mud and water heaving under the lantern-light: saw a deep pool near at hand send out dark waves. The track was empty.

"If anything should happen to me, don't try to do anything. You must get through."

She remembered.

"No use," she panted, reloading her revolver, while sobs shook her from head to foot. "A regiment couldn't save him now—but if he'd only called out in time. . . . He's given his life, as sure as ever— Oh, how am I to— Mary Ann Carter, don't lose your head. Don't dare. You get through, I tell you. . . . Confound the lock—that's it."

Panting, shaking, beating back her tears, she made the last piece of the track, and climbed up on the other side. Safe. But what of him?

"He gave his life," she said, letting the tears go at last. "If he'd called out I might have hit the brute—but he wanted me to get clear . . . for her . . ."

The rain had passed: the stars shone out. The night was very still.

Mrs. Carter looked up to the arch of eternal splendour, high above the spiring palms.

"If ever a man went straight to heaven, whatever he's been or done, it's Rupert Dence," she said.

She ceased her tears. She gathered herself together. She went up the slope. The boys and the carrying-chair were waiting on the top.

Mrs. Carter was widely known in Papua as a nigger-driver. She had never earned the title so fully as she earned it that night.

CHAPTER XIX

IT was one of New Guinea's diamond days. The river dazzled unbearably down at the foot of the cliff: light shot in spangles from the points of forest leaves that stood up as stark as foliage of cast metal. It seemed as though no roof, no shade, were dark enough to shut away the sun. Under the deep-hung palm leaves that thatched the house above the river it came this burning noon, dropping white-hot pencils on the empty lounge and deserted work-table in the outer room, weaving lattice work of molten silver in the inner chamber round the borders of the carefully guarded shadow that lay, all day and all night, about Charmian's bed.

Charmian was lying in the heart of the shadow asleep. Her little son slept in a white-hung basket at her side. Mrs. Carter, her back turned to the bed, was busying herself, somewhat unnecessarily, it seemed, about the tidying of the dresses that hung on the wall. Beside the bed, his strong brown hand laid very lightly on the flower-pale fingers that drooped over the edge of the sheet, sat Scott. He had been there since early morning: it was now near noon.

"George, leave her, and let me stop: you've never

had a bite to eat to-day," said the figure at the wall, somewhat thickly, without turning round.

"I won't leave," answered Scott. His face in the last two days had grown a span smaller: his eyes looked out of dark caves. "There'll be time for everything when . . ." He stopped.

Mrs. Carter, her face curiously wrinkled, but her eyes dry, turned round from the wall.

"George—don't you eat your heart out," she said. "We did what could be done. If all the doctors in Sydney had been here it would have been the same."

"Brabant's still delirious. He was a hundred and six yesterday," was Scott's only answer.

"Six, or six hundred, it don't matter," declared the Queen. She crossed the room and looked at the sleeping face. The eyes were ringed with violet: the delicate nose stood sharp and high. "Nothing matters," said the Queen.

There was a pause: the short, quick breathing of the child sounded in the quiet room. Charmian's breast heaved slowly, silently.

"Will she not wake up?" asked Scott, keeping his hungry eyes fixed on her face. The minutes for looking on that face were numbered now.

"No telling. She might."

They sat there silently: Mrs. Carter's fan swept back and forward over the brown-curling head on the pillow. A minute—or an hour?—went by.

"She wasn't made for long life—anyhow," said

Mrs. Carter, her hand laid on Scott's head as on a child's.

"She had her day." Another pause.

"She said to me, just after—— I don't know as I ought to tell you."

"Tell me," said Scott, both hands now clasped about the drooping fingers on the bed.

"She said—'I've had his son—*she* can't do more.'"

"I never knew she knew," said Scott, looking up, startled. "I never told her."

The room was still again, the sun-rays sank—sank down. The day was waning. No need to guard the shadow round the bed: it deepened as they watched. And now on Charmian's face the shadow deepened too. The quiet breathing fluttered: the lips dropped apart. Scott saw her eyes were open.

"My love!" he said, his face close to hers. "Charmian—are you awake?"

There was a slight struggle, and then—

"I'm waking." And, very faint, "Good-bye."

They sat beside her, afterwards, for almost another hour: and, in the gathering shadows, neither knew when Charmian woke at last.

CHAPTER XX

ANDERSON handed the glass to his friend.

"It's Colombo all right," he said.

"Colombo," agreed Scott, looking out to the blue horizon. The *Macedonia* ploughed steadily across the quiet sea. A dark line was steadily growing out on the edge of the world. Some of the passengers, collected on the promenade deck, were quoting Kipling:

"The Indian Ocean sets and smiles
So sof', so bright, so bloomin' blue,
There ain't a wave for miles and miles,
Except the jiggle of the screw."

Others were murmuring the far too well-known hymn that celebrates the "spicy breezes" alleged to "roll" from cinnamon gardens that used to be, and are not. The deck stewards, hurrying round with trays of tinkling glasses, assumed a look of patient endurance. Only the P. & O. deck stewards themselves can tell what they are made to suffer, through that hymn—and telling is naturally impossible, with the fees of half a voyage yet ahead.

Scott felt curiously moved at the sight of the growing land. It was the Old World's first outpost—the first returning glimpse of the lands above

the Line that he had left two years—could it only be two years?—before. Now the last link with the new, unbroken countries was left behind: he had parted from Australasia. . . . As for the Red Sea and the Mediterranean, and Marseilles and “Gib,” they were next thing to home.

Much interest had been aroused on the *Macedonia* by these two passengers, about whom no one, early in the voyage, could obtain any information. It was generally supposed, up to Perth, that they were important Colonial dignitaries travelling incognito: afterwards a report went round to the effect that they were two Russian princes in disguise. Their lack of interest in deck sports, and their total indifference to the still more popular sports of toad-eating and tuft-hunting, encouraged these two suppositions, and laid upon them the necessity of repulsing a good many unwelcome acquaintances. When it leaked out, through the industrious “little bird” inhabiting the Marconi mast of the P. & O. liner, that Anderson and Scott were two miners from New Guinea, who had found a fabulously rich gold mine, and were off to spend the proceeds, public opinion wavered. Had they enough gold to gild the undoubted squalor of their occupation? Public opinion, helped by the little bird, decided that they had. The romantic possession of a motherless baby, by one of the mysterious passengers, turned the scale still further. The stewardess in charge of little Rupert was interviewed, coaxed, and bribed to tell all she knew,

and a great deal she did not. In the end, by dint of much detective work, the following story was unearthed and passed about the ship:—

Anderson and Scott had really found a gold mine, and made a fortune out of it. Scott was going home to see his old friends in Belfast, and live there. The baby belonged to him: his wife had died in New Guinea. Anderson (of whose iron self-possession and cool dry humour nobody could make anything at all—except that he really “must be somebody”)—Anderson was going for a tour round the world. The two had had the wildest adventures: you couldn’t fancy (which was quite true). Some of their gold—ten thousand pounds, it was said—had been stolen from them, and the man who stole it had never been found till ages and ages after. The little bird, at the last Australian port, was able to supplement its chirpings on this subject by the plain narrative of a local newspaper, which gave a vivid account of the finding of the gold:—

“EXCITING INCIDENT IN PAPUA.

MINER’S LOST GOLD RECOVERED.

HOW THE THIEF MET HIS DOOM.

“Our Port Moresby correspondent, by the last mail, sends an interesting and exciting account of a strange adventure in the unexplored wilds of Papua. Some weeks ago, a party of miners, prospecting in unknown country about the Kikiramu field, came unexpectedly upon a village of the Kariva tribe, which was evidently inhabited, but which had been

deserted on the arrival of the party. Fires were still burning in the houses, and freshly chewed betel-nut had been expectorated about the track, showing that the Karivas were, in all probability, concealed close at hand. The miners explored the village, and found among other trophies, in the usual cannibal temple, the unmistakable skull of a white man. It had been broken in at the top, the Kariva tribe being in the habit of extracting the brains and eating them fried in the top of the skull. The teeth were stopped with gold; this, together with the general shape of the skull, serving to identify it as that of a prospector named Clay, who had been missing for the better part of a year.

"In the bush close to the village the miners found a heavy parcel of canvas, part rotted away, and containing over eight hundred ounces of gold. It appeared that the Karivas had opened the parcel, and finding in it no knives, tomahawks, or other article of any value to them, had thrown it away in the bush, where it lay untouched until found.

"This gold had been stolen from one of the discoverers of the notorious Iri field, many months before. It was at once restored to its rightful owner, and the skull buried in the Kikiramu camp. So ends one of New Guinea's many mysteries."

Anderson and Scott themselves had seen the paper at Perth, and were looking over it again as the *Macedonia* made her way towards Point de Galle.

"Substantially correct," said Scott, folding up the scrap and putting it in his pocket. "Joe, I can't believe it all happened now. It seems like a yarn that someone else has told me. Only for——"

He broke off and looked out across the sea. Anderson knew how to read the look. In the last six months the boyishness had disappeared from his comrade's face for good: and a certain shadow, dating from the days on the Iri River, had made its home in his eyes. Scott was "still young," but he was no longer a "young man."

"I don't believe much of it myself," agreed Anderson thoughtfully.

They were left to themselves now: the passengers had gone away in a crowd to watch the Bishop of Negropolis hopping on one leg along the deck, and endeavouring to pick up more potatoes with a spoon than the wife of the Governor of British Chili had already been happy enough to secure.

"I shall be home in three weeks," said Scott. "Joe—you remember——"

"What?"

"What I told you, that night we left Port Moresby."

"Yes, I remember," said the big miner, standing up against the rail, his hands hanging down at his sides. Anderson had no nervous tricks—Scott used often to wonder how he could keep so still for so long.

"I've been thinking it all over, again and again. You know, my letter missed her—I've found that out since—and she never really knew anything except that I'd been up country for a long while, and

got out of reach of mails: she thought me dead, I believe."

"Yes."

"I am going to see her the minute I get to Ireland. I mean to tell her everything."

"And then what will you do?"

"I don't know."

But some years after, when his little daughter was first laid in his arms, he remembered the all but last words spoken to Mrs. Carter by Charmian, and knew that she, at least, had known.

The Scotts have a beautiful country house, not very far from Balmoral, on the Lisburn Road. There are leather chairs in the dining-room, and velvet chairs in the drawing-room, and there are conservatories, and a motor garage, and a stable, with one or two good saddle horses. Scott has a small yacht with a motor, and uses it in the summer-time. Janie has carriages and furs, and more than one solid silver tea-set. They agree excellently well; Scott is growing a little stout, and thinks of standing for Parliament one of these days.

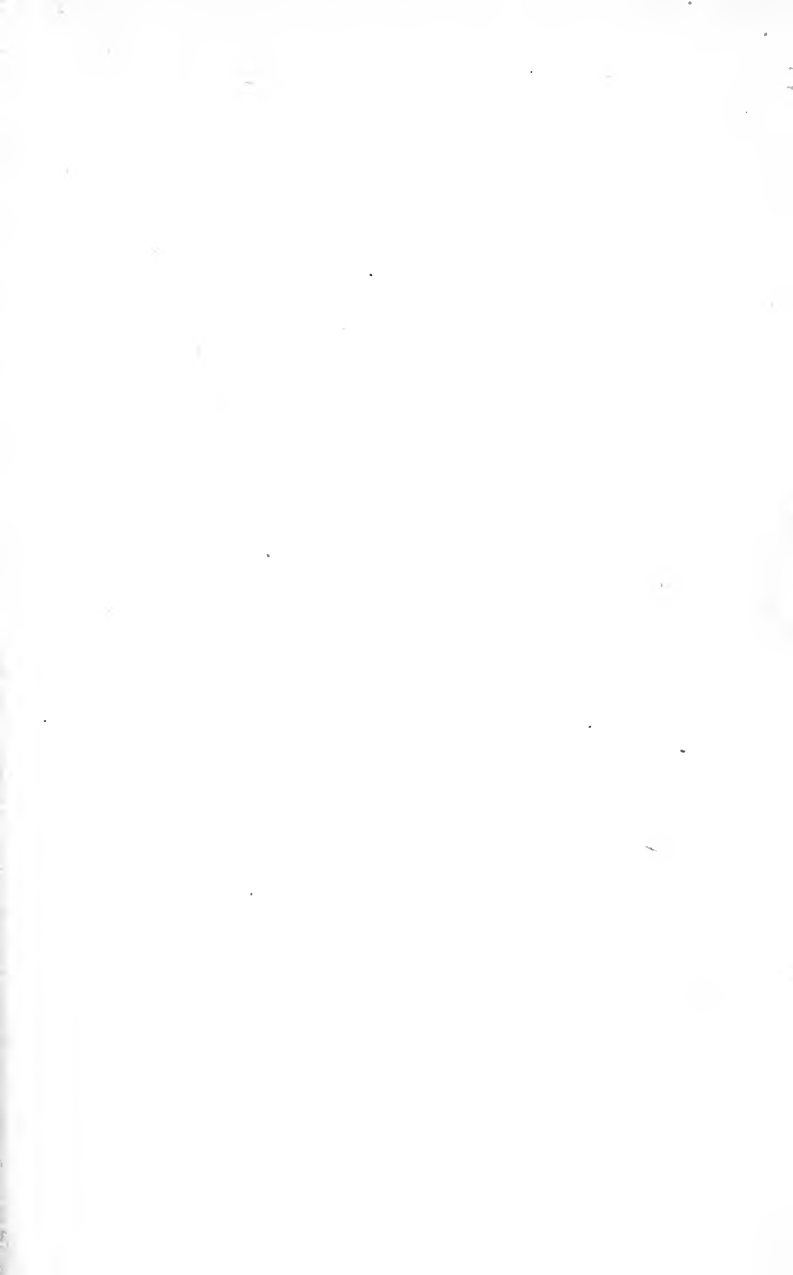
Janie is a just and kindly stepmother. The toys of her little girls are never better than Rupert's, and she always remembers to kiss him every night, and to call him dear. Sometimes, when she sees his father holding him nursed in his arms of an evening, looking at the honey-brown eyes and scarlet lips of the child as a man may look at the picture of some-

thing loved and lost, she goes away to her own room and sorts linen determinedly, with a hard-set lip. She does not believe in crying. Sometimes, too, when Scott takes one of his rare fits of restlessness, and disappears for a week at a time, flying down the Channel on his yacht—southward, always towards the sun—she feels a strange fear creep about her heart. But she does not believe in worrying: there are the children, and there is Duty.

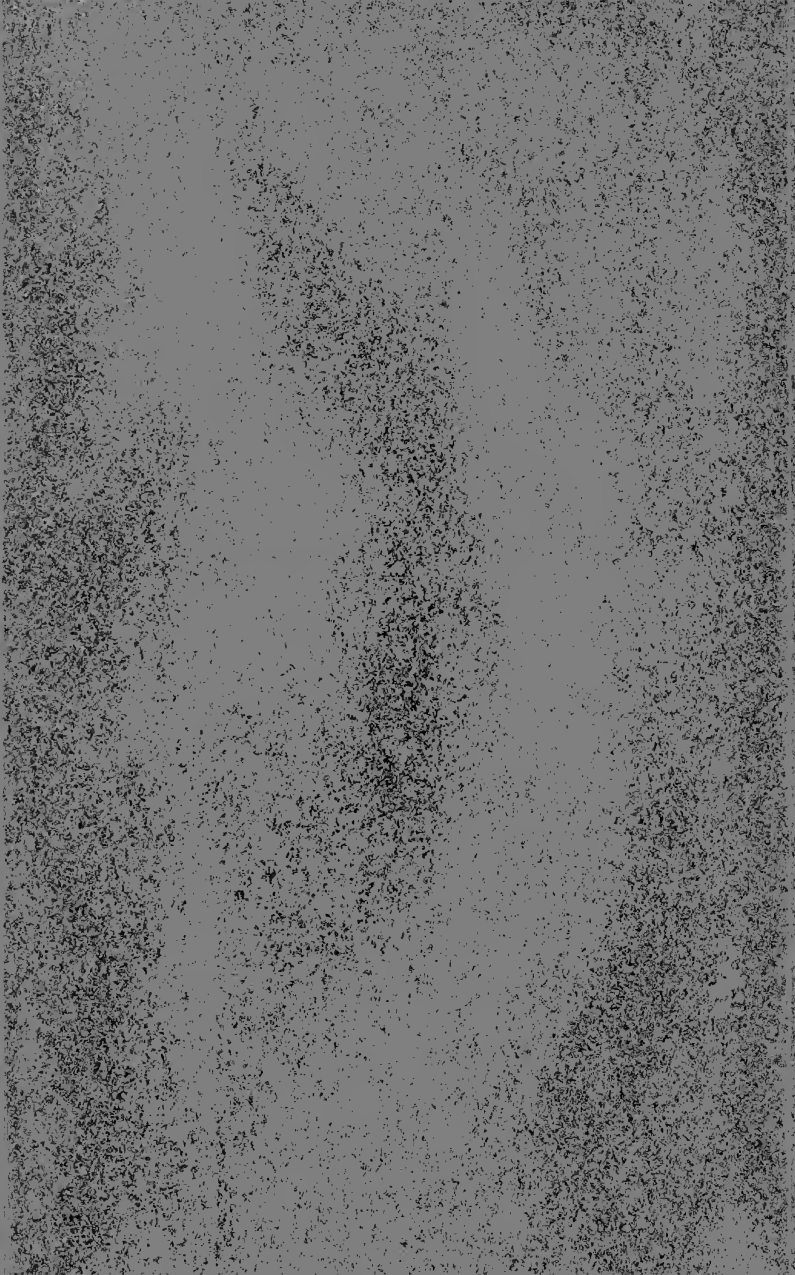
By the Iri River the grass grows over Charmian.

THE END









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